Université de Montréal

The Question of Identity in Italian-Canadian Fiction

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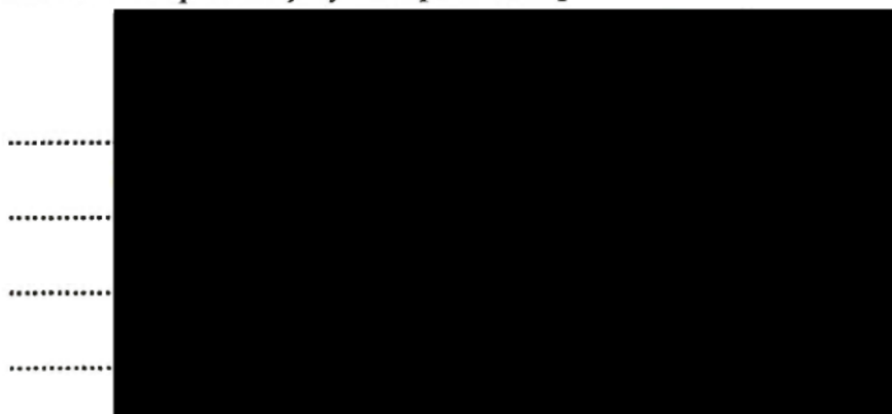

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Résumé de synthèse

Tenter de définir l'identité canadienne a traditionnellement été un des objectifs de l'écrivain(e) canadien(ne). La contribution des minorités ethniques dans la formation et la compréhension de la culture canadienne et de la mosaïque canadienne est représentée dans ce que Enoch Padolsky nomme «écriture de minorité ethnique.» Ces dernières années, cette écriture a joué un rôle majeur pour la clarification de la complexité de l'identité canadienne. Les Italo-Canadien(ne)s figurent parmi les nombreuses communautés actives sur la scène littéraire canadienne. Particulièrement pendant la dernière décennie, le corpus littéraire italo-canadien, dont le développement est parallèle à la croissance de la communauté italo-canadienne, a vu bon nombre de publications, surtout des romans.

Cette thèse analyse la représentation de l'identité intermédiaire dans sept romans par cinq écrivain(e)s italo-canadien(ne)s: *The Italians* (1978), *Black Madonna* (1982), et *The Father* (1984) de Frank Paci, *The Lion's Mouth* (1982) de Caterina Edwards, *Infertility Rites* (1991) de Mary Melfi, *In a Glass House* (1993) de Nino Ricci, et *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995) de Antonio D'Alfonso. Les romans tracent le processus vers la définition d'une identité qui est déchirée entre deux cultures conflictuelles, l'italienne et la canadienne. L'analyse de ces récits démontre que la tension et la négociation entre les composantes italienne et canadienne de l'identité biculturelle représentées au niveau des événements racontés sont aussi présentes au niveau de la narration et de la texture de l'écriture. Autrement dit, l'italien et le canadien sont

illustrés dans le processus de narration et dans le tissage des mots sur la page.

Les romans discutés suggèrent que pour définir son identité il est essentiel de reconnaître ses origines: le sujet est troublé jusqu'à ce qu'il soit capable de négocier avec les composantes de l'identité biculturelle. Un voyage orienté vers l'intérieur de soi, vers la mémoire et vers le passé, permet une meilleure compréhension du présent et conduit vers une réconciliation entre les éléments d'une identité fragmentée. Ceci est clairement illustré au niveau de l'histoire – ce qui est raconté – et est renforcé au niveau de la narration. Les niveaux de narration et le mode établi par le processus de narration fonctionnent pour illustrer la dualité et la confusion inhérentes dans l'identité italo-canadienne. Ainsi, le processus de narration – l'ordre utilisé pour raconter les événements tout comme de quel point de vue ils sont racontés – joue un rôle important dans la question de l'identité telle que représentée dans les romans étudiés.

La langue est l'un des éléments qui cause de la friction entre les deux cultures présentées dans les récits. La question d'identité se joue dans le tissage des mots: la présence de la langue d'«héritage» dans le «texte ethnique» est un moyen utilisé par l'écrivain(e) pour illustrer la tension et la négociation qui s'exercent dans l'identité biculturelle. L'entremêlement de la langue d'héritage avec la langue de la majorité dans le pays d'adoption est une tentative de rapprochement entre les deux cultures.

À travers leurs fictions, les écrivain(e)s italo-canadien(ne)s

suggèrent que pour pouvoir faire face à l'élément de «schizophrénie» inhérent dans culture biculturelle, l'individu doit entreprendre une réévaluation de la culture d'héritage. En écrivant à propos de leurs expériences biculturelles spécifiques et celles de leurs ancêtres, les écrivain(e)s intermédiaires-canadien(ne)s valorisent l'expérience immigrante et contribuent simultanément à la formation de l'identité canadienne. À travers la fiction, l'écrivain(e) italo-canadien(ne) donne à sa communauté une identité et un espace spécifique à l'intérieur de la mosaïque canadienne.

Abstract

Attempting to define the Canadian identity has traditionally been one of the objectives of the Canadian writer. The contribution of ethnic minorities to the shaping and understanding of Canadian culture and the Canadian mosaic is represented in what Enoch Padolsky calls "ethnic minority writing." In recent years, this writing has played a major role in shedding some light on the complexity of the Canadian identity. Italian-Canadians figure among the numerous communities active on the Canadian literary scene. In the last decade in particular the Italian-Canadian literary corpus, which traces its development alongside the growing Italian-Canadian community, has seen numerous publications, especially novels.

This thesis analyzes the representation of the hyphenated identity in seven novels by five Italian-Canadian writers: Frank Paci's *The Italians* (1978), *Black Madonna* (1982) and *The Father* (1984), Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* (1982), Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* (1991), Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* (1993) and Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995). The novels trace the process towards defining an identity which is torn between two conflicting cultures, the Italian and the Canadian. The analysis of the narrative structure shows that the tension and the negotiation between the Italian and the Canadian components of the bicultural identity represented at the level of the events narrated are also at work at the level of different narrative perspectives and in the texture of the writing. In other words, the Italian and the Canadian identities are illustrated in the very organization of the different narrative strands and in the weaving of the words on the page.

The novels discussed suggest that to define one's identity it is essential to acknowledge one's origins: the self is in turmoil until it is able to negotiate the components of the bicultural identity. A journey oriented towards the inner self, towards memory and towards the past, allows a better understanding of the present and leads to a reconciliation between the elements of a fragmented identity. This is clearly illustrated at the level of the story – the narrated – and reinforced at the level of the narration. The levels of narration and the pattern established by the process of narration function to illustrate the duality and confusion inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. Thus, the process of the telling – the sequence used in telling the events as well as from whose perspective they are told – plays an important role in the question of identity as represented in the novels under study.

Language is one of the elements which causes friction between the two cultures presented in the narratives. The question of identity is played out in the weaving of the words: the presence of the "heritage" language within the "ethnic text" is a device used by the writer to illustrate the tension and negotiation at work in the bicultural identity. The interweaving of the heritage language with the language of the majority in the adopted country is an attempt to bring the two cultures together.

Through their fiction Italian-Canadian writers suggest that in order to come to terms with the element of "schizophrenia" inherent in a bicultural identity, the individual must undertake the process of reevaluating the heritage culture. By writing about their specific

bicultural experience and that of their ancestors, hyphenated-Canadian writers are simultaneously valorizing the immigrant experience and contributing to the shaping of the Canadian identity. Through fiction, the Italian-Canadian writer gives her/his community an identity and a specific space within the Canadian mosaic.

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For Domenic, Liana and Dario

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Introduction

From the early 1900s, Canadian literature has consisted of works by non-English and non-French writers. In the second half of this century in particular, the literary production of Native peoples and immigrants has increased considerably and, therefore, become more visible. It is only in the last ten years or so, however, that Canadian literary critics and academics have begun to value the contribution of these writers.

These "other" literary voices, which Enoch Padolsky calls "ethnic minority writing" (distinguished from "ethnic majority writing" – the canonized Canadian literature), are slowly being included in academic courses, critical studies and literary anthologies. Furthermore, symposiums and conferences are constantly being organized to promote the general interest and critical development of this literary field of study. In the last few years, influential scholarly literary journals have devoted special issues to "ethnic minority writing." The following were published in 1996 alone: *Canadian Ethnic Studies* published an issue titled *Literary Theory and Ethnic Minority Writing*; *Journal of Canadian Studies* issued *Pulling Together Canadian Literary Pluralities*; and *Mosaic* published *Idols of Otherness: The Rhetoric and Reality of Multiculturalism.* Smaro Kamboureli makes the point that "These gradual and tentative changes have been necessary steps toward revising our understanding of what constitutes Canadian literature" (3).

It may be that the growing interest in ethnicity in this *fin de siècle* is merely a logical evolutionary outcome of the "coming of age" of Canada's ethnically diverse populations. Perhaps the

phenomenon has been abetted by the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism, to encourage "ethnic" communities to become more visible. Linda Hutcheon for one believes that the growing number of ethnic works "published – and thus, taught and read – as 'Canadian' is one of the most exciting and productive results of multiculturalism as both an ideal and a reality in Canada today" (15). Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that ethnicity and cultural multiplicity have sparked debate not only in literature but in numerous fields of study.

Since Canada's birth there has been a need, nearly an obsession, to define the Canadian identity. The fact that this need is ongoing is undoubtedly due to the constant changes within the Canadian population: no longer valid is the "myth" of the two founding nations. In the current context, it is impossible to deny that Native peoples are components of the Canadian fragmented identity. Immigrants, for their part, are claiming increasingly larger chunks of the Canadian cultural space. "We are at a point now where the presumed uniqueness of Canadian identity is only that—a presumption . . . we can no longer harbour the conceit that Canadian identity is homogeneous" (Kamboureli 10).

The Canadian identity is being defined and refined within the creative fiction of the "ethnic minority" writer. This thesis analyzes the question of identity expressed in the literary production of one of the new literary voices mentioned above: the Italian-Canadian writer, or the Canadian writer of Italian descent as some prefer to be called. As is the case for many hyphenated writers, the need to define

oneself – to answer the question "Who am I?" – is a key issue in the creative imagination of the Italian-Canadian writer. Although it appears to be a simple question, the response (if one is found) is part of a rather lengthy process for people – immigrants and their descendants – who experience the effects of transplantation from one country to another. Robert Harney argues that being an immigrant, or the child of immigrants, is in itself a source of poor self-esteem (Harney and Scarpaci). Harney has coined the term "disesteem" which refers to the immigrant's, and specifically her/his descendants', rejection of the heritage culture upon contact with the adopted country. This is in part due to the attitude of the governing culture which constantly reminds the newcomer of her/his otherness. The imbalance of power in the relationship between the dominant group and the ethnic individual implies subjection of the latter at all levels: political, economical and psychological. As a result Italian-Canadians, like other minorities, live a constant struggle to focus on and then to assert their identity.

Italian-Canadian fiction illustrates the effects of immigration – otherness, self-disesteem, duality – and the negotiation involved in focussing on a bicultural identity. This thesis analyzes the representation of the hyphenated identity in seven novels by Italian-Canadian writers: Frank Paci's *The Italians* (1978), *Black Madonna* (1982) and *The Father* (1984), Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* (1982), Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* (1991), Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* (1993) and Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995). Seven very different novels which share a common theme: the

search for identity; seven novels written by Canadians of Italian origin, each having characters who struggle to find their true self amid the duality of two cultures: the Italian heritage and the Canadian reality which they inhabit.

The tension between the Italian and the Canadian components which make up the Italian-Canadian identity manifests itself differently in each of the novels. In Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites*, for instance, Nina DiFiore's struggle to distance herself from her Italian heritage, specifically as represented by her mother, culminates in a marriage to an English-Canadian university professor – a sharp contrast to her uneducated immigrant mother. Nina DiFiore feels that her parents' immigration has deprived her of her own identity; she envies her husband whose childhood and family are rooted in Canada. Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* is about Bianca Mazzin,[1] a woman who reconciles the Italian and Canadian components of her identity by writing the story of her cousin Marco. The Italian-Canadian duality is further accentuated in Edwards' novel by shifts in setting between Italy and Canada. Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* depicts Vittorio Innocente's inability, from childhood to adulthood, to fit into the Italian community and Canadian society. Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* presents a protagonist, Fabrizio Notte, who straddles three cultures – Italian,

[1] Several critics (Pivato, Tuzi, Loriggio) refer to the protagonist as Bianca Bolcato because her cousin is Marco Bolcato. Anna Pia De Luca, however, calls her Bianca Mazzini. Bianca's family name is in fact "Mazzin." This was confirmed in a conversation that I had with Caterina Edwards. There is only one instance in the novel which gives evidence of this: Loretta says to Bianca, "Daddy says you Mazzins need to wake up a bit" (80).

Quebecois, and English-Canadian – without feeling "at home" in any one of them. By contrast, Frank Paci's trilogy depicts the collective identity of the Italian-Canadian family: the Gaetanos (*The Italians*), the Barones (*Black Madonna*) and the Mancusos (*The Father*). Paci's novels present the conflicts between the old world and the new. And, read as a trilogy they indicate the progressive and gradual shift from the narrative identity of the family (collective) to that of the individual.

All seven narratives depict in different ways and to varying degrees the tension and the negotiation involved in defining a Canadian identity inscribed by a heritage that is partly "other." The narratives are about defining an identity, deciding where one belongs. This often includes a total rejection of all that is Italian – language, food, customs, clothing, religion, neighbourhood – in an attempt to become "Canadian." This initial rejection is followed by a reevaluation of *italianità* or Italianness, a process which can be referred to as the "journey home" or the quest for identity, the search for true self. The journey or the quest reconnects the protagonist to her/his heritage, resulting in some form of reconciliation between the Italian and the Canadian.

The question of identity, however, is much more than a thematic component of the novels under study here. I will argue that the tension and the negotiation between the Italian and the Canadian components of the bicultural identity represented at the level of the events narrated are also at work at the level of the narrative structure and in the texture of the writing. In other words,

the Italian and the Canadian are illustrated in the different narrative perspectives, in the weaving of the words on the page, and in language interference.

My analysis begins with a chapter on the origin and evolution of Italian-Canadian literature within the context of Canadian ethnic minority writing. Given that Italian-Canadian literature is fairly new, I think it essential to trace its roots. My discussion attempts to generate a working definition of Italian-Canadian literature, to identify its present status within Canadian literature, and to anticipate its future place within the Canadian literary canon.

Chapter 2 discusses the conflicts and tension inherent in the bicultural identity as represented in the subject narrated. The narrated presents the duality of the Italian-Canadian experience: the "push and pull" between two worlds experienced by the children of immigrants affects the children as well as the parents. Each novel discussed demonstrates the pressure from the Italian collective to remain faithful to their roots and the individual's desire to move towards the less stifling Canadianness. The novels trace the path undertaken by the characters towards becoming a better, more complete self. It is this quest for identity or the "journey home" which leads to an answer to the question "Who am I?" The path towards "home" involves finding a way to negotiate the conflicting components that make up the protagonist's identity: it is only when s/he acknowledges her/his Italian origins that s/he can know herself/himself. The quest for identity presented in each of the novels is a process towards reterritorialization: when the conflicting

duality within the protagonist is overcome, s/he is able to make a space for herself/himself within the Canadian landscape.

Chapter 3 and 4 analyze the Italian-Canadian duality at the level of narration. Chapter 3 discusses the process of narration while Chapter 4 concentrates on the narrator. Although it is difficult to keep both discussions completely separate, I thought it best to present two shorter chapters rather than a lengthy one. Chapter 3 analyzes the link between the process of narration and the question of identity. I want to specify that this chapter is not a rigorous narratological analysis; instead, the terms of narratology are used towards rethinking questions of identity inherent in the Italian-Canadian novels under study. The discussion concentrates on the levels of narration and the pattern established by the process of narration which, I argue, is done to represent the confusion within the Italian-Canadian identity.

Four of the seven novels under study are narrated in the first person: *The Lion's Mouth*, *Infertility Rites*, *Fabrizio's Passion* and *In a Glass House*. In Chapter 4, I analyze the role of the first-person narrator and how s/he embodies the conflicting components of her/his bicultural identity. Narrating her/his tale is in itself a step in the process towards defining her/his identity. The telling of the tale is a form of cleansing which leads to finding the self. The narrator's existence is affected by the tension created by the Italian and the Canadian components of her/his bicultural identity. The constant shifting which occurs between the past and the present, the experiencing self and the narrating self, illustrates the narrator's state

of confusion and the act of narrating leads to some sense of order.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses language interference, the presence of the Italian word within the Italian-Canadian novel written in English. I argue that the conflicting components within the Italian-Canadian identity are represented in the weaving of the words: that is, tension arises when the Italian word invades or breaks the English sentence. "The Italian" surfaces in different forms to break the flow of the English narrative: as a translated or untranslated word; as a literal translation of a phrase or sentence given in English; and as an English sentence having a latinate structure.

The novels discussed in this thesis illustrate that in order to define or focus on one's identity – to answer the question "Who am I?" – it is essential to acknowledge one's origins. A journey oriented towards the inner self, towards memory and towards the past, allows a better understanding of the present and leads to a reconciliation between the elements of a fragmented identity. The novels mentioned above, each in their own way, give a literary representation of identity and otherness as experienced by the children of Italian immigrants to Canada. The novels trace the process towards defining an identity which is torn between two cultures. The self is in turmoil until it is able to negotiate the components of the bicultural identity. I will not conduct an exhaustive analysis of all seven novels within each of the five chapters of this thesis; rather I have chosen to discuss selectively those that are most pertinent and best illustrate the argument laid

out in a given chapter. Although my discussion touches, here and there, on several elements that contribute to the shaping of the Italian-Canadian identity such as food, religion, sexuality and gender roles, the focus is on two key issues: the family and language.

This thesis brings together a writer such as Nino Ricci who is internationally renowned due to the success of his first novel (*Lives of the Saints*); others such as Frank Paci, Mary Melfi and Caterina Edwards who have been writing for nearly two decades but who are fairly unknown outside the field of minority literature, although their writing has received some critical attention; and Antonio D'Alfonso who is better known as a publisher and critic rather than a novelist. The texts under study written by D'Alfonso (*Fabrizio's Passion*), Melfi (*Infertility Rites*) and Edwards (*The Lion's Mouth*) are for each their only published novel thus far. *In a Glass House* is Ricci's second published novel; his third, *Where She Has Gone,* (1997) has just been published. As for Paci, the three novels included here (*The Italians, Black Madonna* and *The Father*) are the first three of seven published novels.

Personal preference aside, I have chosen these writers/novels because the writers live/write in different regions in Canada and because the novels were published over three decades: the first in 1978 (*The Italians*) and the most recent in 1995 (*Fabrizio's Passsion*). I chose Paci's *The Italians* because it is an important marker in the evolution of Italian-Canadian literature. The period of its publication (1978) is unofficially considered as marking the birth of Italian-Canadian literature as a new Canadian literature. It was in

1978 that Pier Giorgio Di Cicco published *Roman Candles,* the first anthology of Italian-Canadian fiction; and that Antonio D'Alfonso founded a publishing house, Guernica Editions, specifically to promote Italian-Canadian writing. I chose D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* because it is a rarity in that it presents a protagonist influenced by three cultures (Italian, Quebecois and English-Canadian). Furthermore, I wanted to include a recent Italian-Canadian novel and, in 1995, when I began working on this thesis, *Fabrizio's Passion* had just been published.

As I mentioned above, I included Paci's trilogy because it shows the gradual shift in the quest for identity from the collective search to the individual search. In the earlier novel (*The Italians*), the individual has a quest, that is, s/he has personal goals and aspirations, but gives it up for the good of the family. In the second novel (*Black Madonna*), Joey sacrifices his personal quest for the family whereas his sister Marie does not. The third novel (*The Father*) presents the individual's quest at the expense of the family. The immigrant holds on to the traditional cultural values whereas the children move away from them as they become acculturated into Canadian society. The issues raised by Paci's trilogy are situated between the old generation and the new. Thus, Paci's novels set the stage for the novels of Edwards, Melfi, Ricci and D'Alfonso which concentrate on the new generation.

* * * * *

A considerable number of critical studies on Italian-Canadian writng have been published over the last decade. Among these, a collection of essays edited by Joseph Pivato stands out. Pivato's *Contrasts* (1985) includes essays which examine Italian-Canadian literature as a minority literature in the context of world literature. As Pivato points out, "Probably more than other ethnic literatures Italian-Canadian writing does not fit easily into one cultural tradition. It exists in English, French and Italian and is influenced by all three literary traditions" (11). *Contrasts* looks at the international associations of immigration; it sees dislocation as a universal human experience.

Writers in Transition (1990), edited by C. Dino Minni and Anna Foschi Ciampolini, is the published version of the papers given at the first national conference of Italian-Canadian writers (1986). This collection makes the point that Italian-Canadian writers usually use their roots as a stepping stone in their writing; that is, it is necessary for the writer to come to terms with her/his background before writing about something else. Once this has been accomplished the writer moves on to other issues which target a wider audience. This collection of essays, then, concentrates on the "transition" that has been made by the Italian-Canadian writer.

More recent is Joseph Pivato's *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures* (1994) which examines works by Italian-Canadian writers while attempting to establish links with other minority writing. Pivato states that "Any analysis of ethnic origin necessarily raises questions of identity. In looking at ourselves as Italians in Canada

we may be able to see ourselves as Canadians in the world community" (104). Published this year (1997), Marino Tuzi's *The Power of Allegiance* is the first book-length critical study which concentrates on Italian-Canadian prose fiction (novels and short stories). Tuzi's text focusses on Italian-Canadian writing as a stepping stone towards an interdisciplinary study of culture and society.

The question of identity in minority literature, and specifically in Italian-Canadian writing, has been studied extensively in reviews, articles and at conferences. It is a topic which is never exhausted. My thesis is the first full-length critical study of the Italian-Canadian novel, bringing together novels and novelists that have not been analyzed jointly before; and it groups writers from across Canada. Until recently there were few Italian-Canadian novels published overall. Writers tended to concentrate on poetry or the short story. In fact, D'Alfonso and Melfi are better known as poets, and Caterina Edwards' first works are short stories and a play.

My thesis groups writers and novels which have not as yet been studied together using the quest for identity as a framework. Each of the novels chosen illustrates in a different way the steps in the quest for identity. The thesis analyzes identity as represented on four specific levels: it argues that the tension and negotiation at work between the Italian and the Canadian, which is evident in the depiction of subjectivity and agency, are also represented in the narrative structure, in the perspective of the narrators, and in the texture of the mixed language.

Chapter One: The Evolution of Italian-Canadian Literature

Literature simultaneously contributes to and reflects a country's identity. Canada's is still a young literature, one which began with the francophone and anglophone literary voices – one which has struggled to assert its own tradition, independent from the English and American literary traditions. In the latter half of this century, the Canadian literary scene has been enriched by the emergence of "other" voices, thus reflecting the multicultural dimension of our country, a country constantly in the process of defining itself.

As Christl Verduyn points out in her introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Canadian Studies*, entitled *Pulling Together Canadian Literary Pluralities* (1996), it is only in the last decade that Canadian literary criticism has paid increasing attention to works by writers who are not originally English or French. "This writing," says Verduyn, "has a long-standing history and tradition in Canada, but only recently has it come to wider critical attention" (3). This recent critical attention was provoked by the many works of fiction, too numerous to mention, and particularly anthologies which appeared in the last ten years, including Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond's *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990), Arun Mukherjee's *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space* (1994), Makeda Silvera's *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature* (1995), and Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996). Of course, it can be surmised that the growing interest in "ethnicity," "otherness," "cultural hyphenation" and

"hybridization" is also due to the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism and its encouragement of "ethnic" communities to become more visible, particularly through the written word. Winfried Siemerling quotes Berry and Laponce as suggesting that ethnicity "is likely to be to the twenty-first century what class was to the twentieth – a major source of social tensions and political conflicts" but also a "source of creation and diversification" (2).

Canadians of Italian origin are among the "ethnic" communities mentioned above. In *Ancient Memories/Modern Identities*, Filippo Salvatore traces the presence of Italians in Canada and their literary production:

> Early Italian-Canadian writers can generally be described as male immigrants who came to Canada as adults with a relatively high level of education. They were somewhat established or already laboured in intellectual fields such as journalism or education. (35)[2]

Italian-Canadians have been writing in Canada from the beginning of this century: in the twenties and thirties Liborio Lattoni wrote poetry in Italian, and Francesco Gualtieri's poetry was published in English. In the forties, Mario Duliani received attention with the publication of *La Ville sans femmes* (1945), a text about the internment of Italian-Canadians during World War II. Its recent translation into English by Antonino Mazza has given the text renewed critical attention.[3] In her essay "Contemporary Italo-

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[2] Salvatore's *Ancient Memories/Modern Identities* is scheduled to be published in 1998. All page references are to the manuscript.

Canadian Literature," Susan Iannucci suggests that Duliani's text is to Italian-Canadian literature what Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* is to Canadian literature, and she states that it is "the first account by a professional writer of Italian origin to detail the experience of Italian Canadians in Canada" (210).

Despite the publication of Duliani's groundbreaking text in the forties, it is not until much later that other Italian-Canadians followed in his footsteps. Prior to the 1970's Italian-Canadians wrote in seclusion, unaware of each others' works, experiences and concerns. Italian-Canadian literature emerged as a field of interest and study in 1978 when Pier Giorgio Di Cicco published *Roman Candles*, an anthology of fiction by seventeen Italian-Canadian writers from across Canada. That same year, Antonio D'Alfonso founded Guernica Editions, a publishing house whose sole interest at the time was works by Italian-Canadians. The eighties witnessed the birth of the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers and biennial conferences held in various cities across Canada. For the past twenty years, then, Italian-Canadian writers have been giving a consistent voice to the Italian-Canadian experience. As Robert Kroetsch has written, "We haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" (63). By telling their story and that of their forefathers, Italian-Canadian writers have given validity to the Italian-Canadian immigrant experience, thereby contributing to the shaping of their identity within the Canadian sphere.

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[3] Published in 1996 under the title *The City without Women*. See also Nicolas Zavaglia's film *Barbed Wires and Mandolins* (1997).

Italian-Canadian texts have focussed on issues and concerns that affect Italian-Canadians in particular, Canadians at large and humanity in general. Early works related the immigrant experience, the consequences of dislocation, and nostalgia. More recent writers are concerned with the need to belong, the desire to define one's identity while "being suspended between two worlds and two value systems" (Salvatore 35).

* * * * *

I. "Other" Canadian Literature

Italian-Canadian literature represents, according to the Canadian literary mainstream, the voice of one of the many "others" in Canada: those who are not originally Canadian (whatever that means); those who did not participate in the founding of the nation. Italian-Canadian literature, however, is an integral component of the Canadian literary scene. Like other so-called hyphenated literatures in Canada, Italian-Canadian writing has been labelled "ethnic literature" and "minority writing." Anthony Tamburri gives the following definition:

> By ethnic literature, I mean that type of writing which deals, contextually, with customs and behavioral patterns that the North American mindset may consider different from what it perceives as mainstream. The difference, I might add, may also manifest itself formalistically—the writer may not follow

> what has become accepted norms and conventions of literary creation, s/he may not produce what the dominant culture considers *good* literature. (12-13)

Because the ethnic text is different, in content and/or in form, it is considered inferior and, therefore, snubbed by the mainstream.

As the focus in recent criticism shows, the terminology used to characterize this type of writing is problematic. Terms such as "ethnic," "other" and "minority," in fact, are dictated by the mainstream in an effort to create a barrier between literary production by writers of English and French origins, called Canadian and Quebecois literature, and literary works by writers whose background is neither English nor French. The divider seems to suggest that there is a pure Canadian literature and an impure Canadian literature, and that the latter is a subcategory of the first but not without resistance from the mainstream. The "impure" Canadian literature includes works by Native writers and works by hyphenated-Canadian writers such as Italian-Canadians, Greek-Canadians and Haitian-Canadians, to name only a few. In his essay "Migration et études littéraires. Essai de théorisation d'un problème ancien aux contours nouveaux," Jean Jonassaint criticizes the use of terms such as "ethnic minority writing" as being "peu opératoire" (15), and he emphasizes the need for more appropriate terms, which have as yet to be found. Linda Hutcheon writes that "the word 'ethnic' always has to do with the social positioning of the 'other', and is thus never free of relations of power and value" (Hutcheon and Richmond 2). Roberto Perin comments that the very term

"ethnic" "implies outcasts from Canadian life" (24). Antonio D'Alfonso, on the other hand, believes that "ethnic" is not a pejorative term, but rather a useful tool to understand North America (Jarque 87).

Smaro Kamboureli insists that "Multicultural literature is not minority writing, for it does not raise issues that are of minor interest to Canadians. Nor is it, by any standard, of lesser quality than the established literary tradition" (3).[4] For some writers and critics, however, the very term "multicultural" means "ethnic" and, therefore, "minor." For others such as Pasquale Verdicchio, for instance, the notion of multiculturalism immediately evokes the power/dominance of the majority culture: "Canada's multicultural mosaic is a euphemism for institutionalized multiculturalism, which is, in turn, *a strategy of containment* adopted out of necessity by the dominant culture in order to maintain its power identity" (214).

Enoch Padolsky suggests that the "mainstream/ethnic" binary category be eliminated. He emphasizes that this binary category reflects the

> . . . dominant Canadian (that is, majority) view of Canadian literature (and of the country) as divided between a dominant political-social-cultural duality, the English-French main-

[4] Kamboureli makes a clear distinction between "multicultural writing" and "minority writing." She sees the latter as inferior to the former. In my opinion, both terms are equivalent because they refer to the same body of writing. The only distinction may be that minority writing implies that just one cultural community is referred to, whereas multicultural writing refers to many cultural groups. I want to specify that I do not interpret "minority writing" as being inferior writing although I am aware that some critics, and the mainstream, do so.

> stream, and ethnics, that is, everybody else. (Within this binary framework, sub-groups such as aboriginals, visible minorities, South Asians, Italian-Canadians function presumably as sub-categories of ethnics.) ("Italian-Canadian Writing and the Ethnic Minority/Majority Binary" 252-3)

Padolsky proposes the binary "ethnic minority/ethnic majority" to replace that of "ethnic/mainstream." The new binary emphasizes size of population rather than dominance and subordination.

The creative works, which span nearly a century, collected in a recent anthology edited by Smaro Kamboureli show the contribution of "ethnic" writers to the Canadian literary corpus. *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996) brings together writers from "a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds." In other words the anthology highlights writers of non-English and non-French origins, from Frederick Philip Grove (originally from Prussia) to Evelyn Lau (of Chinese origin, although she resists the label "Chinese-Canadian"). Earlier writers included in Kamboureli's anthology such as A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Rudy Wiebe are incontestably part of the Canadian literary canon even though their heritage is "other." Is the passing of time responsible for their status as Canadian writers rather than hyphenated-Canadian writers? If so, can we suppose that today's so-called "ethnic" or "hyphenated-Canadian" writers will be recognized as Canadian writers in the future? It is probably too soon to provide an answer to these questions; only time will tell.

Despite Kamboureli's insistance that the writers included in

her collection are "multicultural" and "Canadian," her anthology shows that Canadian writers originating from more recent immigrant groups, such as the Italian, Haitian, Chinese and South Asian, are still struggling to reach the status of "Canadian writer." Kamboureli writes that "this anthology belongs to the geneology of Canadian literature, a body of writings that come from a variety of traditions that used to be kept separate from the so-called main tradition" (1). This quotation, particularly the use of the words "used to be," suggests that there is no longer a divider between Canadian literature considered mainstream and that labelled minority literature. As the subtitle of Kamboureli's anthology suggests, however, the case is not quite so. *Making a Difference* is an anthology of Canadian literature, however, as the subtitle (*Canadian Multicultural Literature*) indicates it is that Canadian literature which is not accepted by the mainstream simply as Canadian literature. In spite of the contradictions, this view is Kamboureli's goal in putting together such an anthology. Canadian literature should be the body of writings produced by Canadians – all Canadians, not just Canadians of English and French origins. But as Kamboureli says below, and rightly so, Canadian literature "as an institution" has not yet reached this level:

> As a collage of voices, *Making a Difference* fashions an image of Canadian culture that reveals how we have come to our present moment in history. . . . *Canadian Multicultural Literature.* In some respects, one word too many. For Canadian literature is, should be thought of, as reflecting the

> multicultural make-up of the country. That I feel compelled to spell this out, that I do so at a time when, for example, some of the contributors to this anthology have won some of the most coveted Canadian literary prizes, suggests that Canadian literature—Canadian literature as an institution—is still not as diverse as it should be. (1-2)

The fact that Kamboureli uses the word "Multicultural" in the subtitle of her anthology, and furthermore that she admits that it is "one word too many" points to the ambivalence inherent in attempting to break the barrier erected by the mainstream.

The literary mainstream is as wary of new writers who are not of English or French origins as the general population is of the newcomer, the immigrant. In fact, many "ethnic" literary texts relate the resistance of the "welcoming" society to immigrants. This resistance, then, is not only part of reality, but it is also captured in the text and transposed to the cultural/literary level of the writer. What results is a constant need to belong: to the welcoming society, to the literary mainstream. Quoting Marlene Nourbese Philip, Bina Toledo Freiwald explains the play on the word "be/longing": the immigrant's dilemma, and that of the "other" writer, is that to belong is always to be longing.[5] The state of "longing to belong" is in part due to the mainstream's resistance to those people considered to be "other."

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[5] Freiwald makes this point in "Canadian Self-Portraits: National Identity in Contemporary Women's Autobiographical Writing," a paper presented at the Learned Societies Congress (Association for Canadian Studies) in St. John's, Newfoundland, on June 8, 1997. A version of this paper was also presented at a conference, Le Quebec anglais: littérature et culture, in Montreal in April 1997.

The literary mainstream tends to segregate and, by so doing, is guilty of misrepresenting the true nature of Canadian writing. Why is there a resistance to "other" literary voices? The fact that they are labelled "other" clearly points to the distance and resistance in the mainstream. As mentioned above, the use of terms such as ethnic writing, minority writing, and new Canadian writing have a tendency to distance this literature from Canadian literature. Ironically, despite this resistance, or perhaps because of it, several literary critics and academics[6] are focussing on "other" writing. Then "why are minority literatures in Canada 'literatures of lesser diffusion,' why are major Italian-Canadian writers' works allowed to go out of print, why are 'visible minority' works 'published and then damned' . . ." (Padolsky, "Italian-Canadian Writing" 257). Joseph Pivato has suggested that some writers want to maintain this perspective of the outsider because it gives them the critical edge.

As some critics (Padolsky, Verduyn) have pointed out, there is a clear resistance to terms imposed on "minority" writers/writing by critics and writers themselves. It is ironic, however, that titles of texts such as anthologies and collections of essays use the very terms that are being resisted (for example, *Literatures of Lesser Diffusion*), thus suggesting a certain yielding to the perception of the mainstream. Is it that to be recognized they must use the labels imposed by the mainstream, or is it that given the "trendiness" of ethnicity and ethnic studies writers/critics are playing up to the

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[6] To name a few: Christl Verduyn, Enoch Padolsky, Lucie Lequin, Arun Mukherjee and Joseph Pivato.

fashion? These labels of identification have a paradoxical function: they join writers to the mainstream by making them a supplement to it, but they also separate them by identifying them as different.

* * * * *

II. Italian-Canadian Literature: A Definition

Over the last two decades writers and critics have attempted to define Italian-Canadian literature in various ways, be it thematically, culturally, nationally or geographically. Following an analysis of definitions by several critics, I will focus on my own definition of Italian-Canadian literature: a body of writing which deals with "the Italian" and "the Canadian" as experienced by individuals in a Canadian setting who are also linked to an Italian heritage.

What Anthony Tamburri writes of the American writer of Italian descent also applies to the Canadian counterpart:

> American writers of Italian descent have obviously contributed greatly to the establishment of an Italian identity in America. Yet few have been able to avoid being relegated to the category of *ethnic* writers, and therefore cast on the margin, as opposed to being considered part of the larger, dominant group we call American writers. The problem here, of course, is that the term *ethnic,* unfortunately, has a negative connotation for those prepossessive of an *American* mindset. Because of this marginalizing phenomenon, many have even avoided direct association with their ethnic heritage at large. This avoidance

> is sometimes preferred, precisely because too often the literary contributions of American writers of Italian descent have been channelled onto an ethnic side street of American literature. (22)

Tamburri's point is certainly true of the Canadian writer of Italian origin. In fact, it has been suggested that certain Italian-Canadian writers would rather not publish with Guernica Editions, precisely because they find it limits their literary reception and keeps them too close to their origins. The question remains, however, whether the publisher plays a role in the reception and fame of the writer. Why is it that a writer such as Nino Ricci who writes about the Italian-Canadian experience is accepted into the mainstream as a Canadian writer, and has achieved international recognition? How is the "Canadian writer status" achieved? Why is it that certain "ethnic" writers shed this label and others do not?

"Minor" writer, "ethnic" writer, "new Canadian" writer – the search for an appropriate term which defines non-mainstream writers is ongoing. Similarly, there has been much debate in order to establish a term which defines the Italian-Canadian writer/literature. The concept of the double adjective, "Italian-Canadian," is used by many literary critics because it joins two identities to define a third one: it brings together "Italian" and "Canadian" in order to define "Italian-Canadian" which, rather than pointing to a hybridization of

the two components, refers to the "space between"[7] them. The Italian-Canadian individual lives between the Italian experience and the Canadian one. Italian-Canadian literature, or Italian-Canadian writing, does not follow either the Italian or the Canadian literary traditions exclusively but lies somewhere between them, creating its own, very unique literary tradition. The Italian-Canadian, or the Canadian of Italian descent, is very distinct from the Italian in Italy and from "the Italian (consulate) elite" living in Canada only temporarily. As Roberto Perin notes in his introduction to *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada,* many if not most of the Italians who emigrated to Canada do not identify with Italian culture but more so with that of their *paese,* or village. "In moments of despair," writes Perin,

> the Italian cultural elite was even heard to say about the immigrants, 'They are not Italians'. In a sense, they were quite correct. Immigrants brought with them a pre-industrial, millenial Mediterrranean culture which was largely circumscribed by family and *paese.* (19)

Perin points out that John Zucchi "posits the emergence of a broader Italian identity, born of the Canadian experience of work, neighbourliness, and the defense of common interests" (18). Furthermore, Perin argues that it is more accurate and less confusing

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[7] The term is Gustavo Pérez Firmat's as quoted by Tamburri: Gustavo Pérez Firmat offers a "cogent exegesis of the bilingual writer (in his case the Cuban American) who, in adopting both languages (at times separately, at other times together in the same text), occupies what he considers the "space between" (21). See Firmat's "Spic Chic: Spanglish as Equipment for Living," *The Caribbean Review* 15.3 (Winter 1987): 20ff.

to call the new identity which "blossomed in the Canadian environment" (18) Italian-Canadian. One may wonder why "Italian" precedes Canadian in the double adjective? In other words, why is it not "Canadian-Italian"? The answer to this question, I think, lies in the fact that the term reflects the chronology of the experience in as much as the Italian component came first: it is part of the heritage, the past. Furthermore, it is fairly common practice to put the country of origin before the adopted country; that is, using the former to modify the identity associated with the country of adoption. In other words, "Italian" modifies "Canadian": a person is "Canadian" but more specifically "Italian-Canadian."

In her essay titled "Contemporary Italo-Canadian Literature," Susan Iannucci defines Italian-Canadian writing as

> . . . a body of literature in English, French, and Italian produced by writers who have at least one parent of Italian origin. These writers are, almost without exception, the second generation, the children of parents who made the decision to emigrate. (224)

It is not only a writer's ancestry which qualifies her/his work as Italian-Canadian writing, the content also treats specific themes and issues connected to the Italian-Canadian experience. The most prominent theme, as Iannucci states, is "a sense of 'wandering between two worlds, one dead/the other powerless to be born' " (224). In other words, Italian-Canadian literature deals with both aspects of the Italian-Canadian experience, the Italian and the Canadian. One may assume that even if a writer is Italian-Canadian but her/his text

has no trace of *italianità*,[8] or is only about Italy with no trace of the Canadian, this would not be Italian-Canadian writing. And, is a writer who has one Italian parent but who does not write about the Italian-Canadian subject matter an Italian-Canadian writer? Iannucci answers this question with the following:

> It is necessary to define Italian-Canadian literature thematically in order to give the term any meaning at all. It is literature which touches both Italy and Canada. To expand it to include all literature written by people of Italian origin is, I think, to turn it into a mere 'geographical hypothesis.'[9] (224-5)

I think what Iannucci means here is "all literature written by people of Italian origin" *in Canada.* For Iannucci, then, Italian-Canadian literature or the Italian-Canadian text must deal with themes that touch both Italy, the country of the writer's (parent's) origins, and Canada, the adopted country. The literary production of a Canadian writer whose heritage is Italian but who does not represent it in her/his work is not Italian-Canadian literature.

I would specify that Italian-Canadian literature is writing which deals with "the Italian" and "the Canadian" (rather than Iannucci's "Italy" and "Canada") as experienced by individuals

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[8] *Italianità* refers to a strong sense of Italian cultural heritage. Anthony Tamburri attempts to define *italianità*: "*Italianità* is indeed a term expressive of many notions, ideas, feelings, and sentiments. To be sure, it is any and all of these things which lead young Italian Americans back to their real and mythical images of the land, the way of life, the values and the cultural trappings of their ancestors. It could be language, food, a way of determining life values, a familial structure, a sense of religion; it can be all of these, as it can certainly be much more. Undoubtedly, a polysemic term such as *italianità* evades a precise definition" (21).

[9] The phrase is from Joseph Pivato's poem "Cultura Canadese," in *Roman Candles*, 81.

within the Canadian landscape who are also linked, to some extent, to an Italian heritage. To say that Italian-Canadian literature, or a text in particular, "touches Italy" is not the same as saying it touches "the Italian." The latter *may* refer back to Italy, but the Italian experience within Canada is very different from that in Italy as Perin has pointed out. (See page 27 above.) The Italian-Canadian writer is a Canadian writer of Italian descent, whose personal and literary experience is inscribed or influenced by an Italian heritage and the Canadian reality which s/he inhabits, and whose literary production witnesses this bicultural experience.

Pasquale Verdicchio refers to the Italian-Canadian writer as an "organic intellectual" (to be distinguished from a "traditional intellectual") because "s/he is the product of a particular group and upholds that group's cultural and political interests" ("Subalterns Abroad" 221). I do not think that this applies to all Italian-Canadian writers. The issue is problematic, for instance, when a writer and her/his writing qualifies as Italian-Canadian, but s/he does not want to be associated with this label. In other words, a writer may be "the product" of the Italian-Canadian group, and her/his writing may be influenced by that group, without upholding the "cultural and political interests" of that group. Frank Paci, for example, says, "I don't think of myself as an Italian-Canadian writer. I'm simply a writer, who lives in Canada, uses English, and is of Italian descent" (Hutcheon and Richmond 233). Paci writes about what he knows: the family and the community, and it so happens that these are Italian-Canadian.

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III. What's in a Label: "To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate"

Much has been said/written in an attempt to find an appropriate term to define the bicultural Italian-Canadian phenomenon. Although there is a consensus on the necessity that both cultures be represented in the "sought" term, certain details remain disputable. Some critics, such as Susan Iannucci, have adopted the term "Italo-Canadian" to designate the bicultural element. The difficulty with this term, I think, is the shortening/truncating of the adjective "Italian" into "Italo" which gives "Canadian" a dominant position and subordinates "Italian." Italian-American critic Anthony Tamburri contests the use of "Italo" as a violation of the complete form of the adjective, *Italian* (46); and he quotes Victoria J.R. DeMara who sees this violation as "an act of *castration.*"

Filippo Salvatore, on the other hand, uses the word "Italianese." This term combines the English word "Italian" with the Italian word for Canadian, "Canadese," thereby creating a crossover or criss-cross between the two cultures and the two languages. Salvatore's term, however, truncates the "Canadian" component into a three-letter suffix ("ese") which does not convey the Canadian or Canadese. Furthermore, the term "Italianese" is also valid to designate other bicultural adjectives: that which is Italian and Japanese (Giapon*ese*), or Italian and Irish (Irland*ese*), to give only a

few examples. Antonio D'Alfonso proposes the term *Italic* to designate "all the peoples of Italian heritage . . . including those from Italy" (184).[10] And, the term "Italians outside Italy" (*Italiani fuori d'Italia*) has also been used.

Of all the terms mentioned above, I would argue that the hyphenated adjective best describes the individual whose specificity lies between two cultures.[11] The adjective "Italian-Canadian" refers to that which is both Italian and Canadian, but more importantly to that which lies between these two terms. The term "Italian-Canadian" best describes the duality that an individual or a literature incorporates given the influence of more than one culture. In this case it is not a derogatory term but merely the best available to describe that identity. Japanese-Canadian writer Joy Kogawa is in favour of the hyphen: in an interview with Magdalene Redekop she says, "I think if everybody was involved in the hyphen, then we would all be together. Even if we are all in different hyphens, we could put a line through the hyphens and be connected as hyphenated people" (Hutcheon and Richmond 99).

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[10] D'Alfonso traces the Italians back to the Italics: "Italy is a nation that took many years to develop. It began about 2600 B.C. with an Indo-European tribe called the Italics who moved down the peninsula and later split into two tribes, the Latins and the Osco-Sabellians . . ." (*In Italics* 185).

[11] The issue becomes more complicated, of course, when an individual bridges more than two cultures. For instance, a writer of Italian origin raised in Quebec may want to include that cultural component as well. Such is the case of Antonio D'Alfonso. D'Alfonso goes beyond this in ascertaining that he is simultaneously Abruzzese, Molisano, Italian, Canadian, Quebecois, European and North American. He states that "For practical purposes one has to abbreviate one's identity without however castrating it. . . . Somehow the individual must let go of certain aspects of his or her specific culture and embrace the larger, more unifying parameters of collective identity. Each one of us must be able to welcome a new synthesis as our identity" (*In Italics* 187).

Although Anthony Tamburri opts for the double adjective, he contests the use of the hyphen because it represents the dominant group's reluctance to accept the newcomer:

> I contend that the hyphen is much more of a disjunctive element, rather than a conjunctive one, when used in couplets denoting national origin, ethnicity, race, or gender. It is, to be sure, a colonializing sign that hides its ideological and, therefore, subjugating force under the guise of grammatical correctness. (44)

Tamburri explains further that the word "hyphen" has its roots in "domination and subjugation" ("*hupo-*, under + *hen*, neuter of *heis*, one"). The hyphen, Tamburri argues, does not link the two terms but rather creates space – "a physical gap" – between them. He proposes to replace the hyphen with the dash (Italian—Canadian) and then to tilt it by forty-five degrees (Italian/Canadian). Thus, the hyphen is replaced by the slash which, according to Tamburri, closes the physical gap, thereby bringing the two terms closer, while maintaining grammatical correctness. The use of the slash to replace the hyphen has been adopted by a number of critics including Antonio D'Alfonso and Fred Gardaphé. I would argue that although the slash does bring the terms closer physically, it does so with some hostility: it being vertical rather than horizontal creates a more erect physical barrier between the two terms. Of course, there is the possibility of reading the slash as a mark of replacement or substitution. The slash points to an option, more than one possibility, as in "and/or, "she/he."

In my opinion, "Italian-Canadian" denotes both elements equally as well as that which lies between them, whereas "Italian/Canadian" points to some resistance by erecting a vertical barrier between "Italian" and "Canadian." The latter term seems unnatural, not as smooth. I have not as yet come across the following term, but it may be a viable option: "ItalianCanadian." By omitting the hyphen, the slash and the space, "ItalianCanadian" creates unity between the two cultural elements. However, my objective here is not so much to find a solution but rather to demonstrate that the search for the appropriate term is ongoing and will probably not be resolved in the near future. The ongoing discussion shows that the question consistently posed is that of the relationship between the Italian and the Canadian. We cannot speak/write of one or the other only, for the very action of articulating or putting both down on paper necessarily says something about the importance of one over the other. The fact that we are constantly wondering how to join the two words is simply a reflection of the reality of living a bicultural identity: there is never complete harmony or unity.

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IV. Italian-Canadian Literature: Yesterday and Today

In the introduction to *Writers in Transition*, C. Dino Minni asks very relevant questions pertaining to the past and the future of Italian-Canadian writing/writers:

> Does *Italian-Canadian* mean that the writer is an immigrant and the theme immigration, and does the writer shed this label when he/she makes a transition to other themes? Or is *Italian Canadian* a sensibility, a distinctive cultural point of view, that is retained through the transition? (10)

The immediate response is to say that it *is* a sensibility although not all those who qualify as Italian-Canadian writers (according to Iannucci's definition given above) possess it. Furthermore, even though a writer may have the Italian-Canadian sensibility, s/he may not want to be associated with her/his heritage: to be labelled a hyphenated writer – an Italian-Canadian writer – is "limiting and discriminatory," (Kamboureli 323) an impediment. Others feel that the Italian heritage has played a big role in their artistic development, and that their heritage is an incentive and provides the material for their writing. Although she does not label herself an Italian-Canadian writer, Mary di Michele acknowledges the important role that her Italian heritage plays in her creative writing:

> 'You run into me in Italian-Canadian writers' conferences because I know how important it was to me as a writer to find in literature an imaginative construct that contained and reflected some of my own kinds of experience.' (Kamboureli 323)

In fact, di Michele has said that her Italian heritage is responsible for, and in some ways the motivation behind, her feminist writing: she "confesses that her immigrant experience has made her more radical as a feminist" (Godard 162). As Barbara Godard, quoting from di

Michele's own writing, puts it: "the exploration of 'the struggle of the immigrant girl' led to 'the feminism of the mature woman' " (162).

The degree of affinity that an Italian-Canadian writer has with her/his heritage has a lot to do with the temporal and geographical distance from the old country and, consequently, depends on which generation of writers s/he belongs to. Earlier writers have a stronger link to the old country because they remember the transfer from one land to the other; the old country is therefore more prominently dealt with in their writing. Later writers, usually born and/or educated in Canada can only talk about (the effects of) emigration and immigration as a second hand experience which they got from their parents. These writers deal with the consequences of belonging to two completely different and often conflicting worlds, the private and the public, as represented by the home/parents and Canadian society. The second generation writers deal with the negotiating that goes on between the effects of both worlds.

Filippo Salvatore divides Italian-Canadian writers into three groups. The first[12] came to Canada prior to World War II (See page 16 above.), whereas the second[13] immigrated as a result of the war. The writers in these two groups are similar in that they are well-educated, they experienced e/immigration first hand and wrote about

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[12] These include Liborio Lattoni, Francesco Gualtieri and Mario Duliani. (See Salvatore 36.)

[13] Salvatore lists the following writers: Giose Rimanelli, Pietro Corsi, Umberto Taccola, Gianni Grohovaz, Camillo Carli, Dino Fruchi, Tonino Caticchio, Ermanno La Riccia, Maria Ardizzi, Matilde Torres, Corrado Mastropasqua, Romano Perticarini (36). Joseph Pivato mentions Elena Randaccio. (See *Social Criticism*, 228.)

it in Italian. The third group[14] consists of "the sons and daughters of first-generation immigrants, born in Canada or Italy, but raised and educated in Canada" (37). A few write in Italian, but most write in French or English. Although for the most part their writing may have begun with immigration, it has moved towards a more North American focus. As Salvatore points out, "while early Italian-Canadian writers tended to limit their scope to their immediate community, the current crop of writers sees the public at large as its target audience" (37).

Despite the fact that Italian-Canadian writing is a relatively new literature, several generations of writers have contributed to its emergence and visibility. I would like to make the distinction here between first, second and third generation Italian-Canadian as opposed to what has often been referred to as first, second or third generation immigrant. Jean Jonassaint points out that it is incorrect to say "second or third generation immigrant" given that it is the generation which moves from one country to another which is the immigrant generation, and those that follow can no longer be called immigrants:

> On a migré ou on n'a pas migré. On naît dans un pays ou un autre. Il n'y a pas d'entre deux, de moyen terme. Cette expression fort courante, ‹‹deuxième génération d'immigrants››,

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[14] Salvatore lists the following: Frank Paci, C. Dino Minni, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Alexandre Amprimoz, Joseph Pivato, Marco Micone, Antonio D'Alfonso, Fulvio Caccia, Mary di Michele, Antonino Mazza, Mary Melfi, Vittorio Rossi, Nino Ricci, Caterina Edwards, Filippo Salvatore (37). There are also others whom Salvatore does not mention such as Marisa De Franceschi, Darlene Madott, Fiorella De Luca Calce and Pasquale Verdicchio.

> utilisée pour désigner les enfants d'immigrants nés ou non au pays d'immigration, est un abus de langage . . ." (17)

I would agree with Jonassaint's "On a migré ou on n'a pas migré." The children of immigrants live the effects of e/immigration as a result of their parents' experience. We tend to use "second or third-generation immigrant" as a way of measuring the temporal distance from the heritage country to the adopted country, but by so doing we are, perhaps inadvertently, questioning/denying Canadian-born descendants of immigrants their rightful place/status in Canada.

Italian-Canadian writing has progressed from issues and themes that affect Italian-Canadians specifically, to those shared by many communities. Early works, those of the immigrant generation, related the immigrant experience, the consequences of dislocation, and nostalgia. These works, such as Maria Ardizzi's *Made in Italy* for instance, illustrate the straddle between the old country and the new. More recent texts, those written by the third group of Italian-Canadian writers – called "writers in transition" by Minni and Ciampolini – are concerned with language, belonging, and the desire to define one's identity. Whereas the "straddle effect" is illustrated at the physical level in the earlier texts, it is done so at the psychological level in later writing. The later writers express a more fervent desire to be recognized as Canadian writers producing Canadian literature.

Language and translation are key issues in Italian-Canadian writing given that the Italian-Canadian's daily reality is influenced by Italian and/or regional dialects, English and French (in Quebec). As Joseph Pivato writes, "the minority writer is always involved in

translation" ("Representation of Ethnicity as Problem" 50). The Italian-Canadian writer is constantly translating his experience in an attempt to render it accessible to himself, first and foremost, as well as to the minor (Italian) and major (Canadian, Quebecois) groups that he belongs to. Consequently, many Italian-Canadian texts blend two or three languages, making the process of translation visible on the written page. It has been suggested that Italian-Canadian writing is the creation of an audible minority rather than that of a visible minority given that the Italian word is very much present in the text. In her essay "Teaching Ethnic Minority Writing: A Report from the Classroom," Arun Mukherjee points out that "Many 'postcolonial' writers have been criticised for mixing English and their native tongue, the implication being that the untranslated words create a barrier between the reader and the text" (43). I would argue that the presence of the heritage language within French or English texts illustrates the duality and the negotiation that the "culturally-hyphenated Canadian" experiences daily: "these texts help us see how ethnicity, language and culture are intertwined" (Mukherjee 46). Antonio D'Alfonso's novel *Fabrizio's Passion* is a good example of this phenomenon, where the same paragraph, even the same sentence, contains words in French, Italian and English. Antonio D'Alfonso's writing exemplifies the Italian-Canadian sensibility as well as the fate of the Italian-Canadian writer who is constantly shifting, constantly translating, in an attempt to bring his identity into focus. In Mukherjee's words, "Ethnic minority texts inform their readers, through the presence of other languages as well as

through a whole repertoire of cultural signs, about the multicultural and multilingual nature of Canadian society" (46).

Several Italian-Canadian writers have had their creative fiction appear in more than one language: Maria Ardizzi's novel *Made in Italy* (1982) appeared simultaneously in English and in Italian; Antonio D'Alfonso's *Avril, ou l'anti-passion* (1990) was published in English under the title *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995), and *The Other Shore* (1985) was translated into *L'autre rivage* (1987); Mario Duliani's *La Ville sans femmes* (1945) appeared shortly before its Italian translation *Città senza donne* (1946), and over fifty years later it was translated into English as *The City Without Women* (1996). In *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures,* Joseph Pivato raises the question of the consequences and the effects of having the same narrative appear in more than one language: he suggests that "the degree of sharing that results from linguistic and cultural translations alters the nature of the experience that is represented" (123). A distinction must be made, I think, between the text which is translated in order to allow accessibility to readers in other countries, as is the case of Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints,* and translation within a given territory. Frank Paci's *The Italians* (1978), for example, was published in French as *La Famille Gaetano* (1990). The text, whether the original or the translation, is part of Canadian literature. But this is not the case for Antonio D'Alfonso's *Avril, ou l'anti-passion* and *Fabrizio's Passion.* As I have argued elsewhere, the latter is not a translation of the former but more an adaptation (See Canton). This, added to the fact that the first was published in

Montreal and the latter in Toronto, makes *Avril, ou l'anti-passion* part of Québecois literature and *Fabrizio's Passion* part of Canadian literature.

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V. Towards a Collectivity

Although Italian-Canadian texts appeared earlier this century, 1978 is the year which marks the birth of Italian-Canadian literature with the publication of Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's anthology, *Roman Candles*. This text is an important literary marker because it establishes the existence of a body of writers working towards the same goals as opposed to a few scattered writers working alone. It was also in 1978 that an Italian-Canadian, Antonio D'Alfonso, founded Guernica Editions specifically for Italian-Canadian writers. That same year, Frank Paci published his first novel, *The Italians,* a narrative relating the Italian-Canadian experience par excellence. *The Italians* is the first of seven novels published by Paci over eighteen years, making his body of writing a substantial contribution to Italian-Canadian literature. Furthermore, Paci's novels as a whole illustrate the progression or stages of the Italian-Canadian experience: that is to say, the first novel addresses the consequences of immigration and the negotiation occurring as the Italian first enters the Canadian setting; and later novels, such as *Sex and Character,* deal with the cultural duality experienced by Canadian-born children of immigrants. It is in the late seventies, then, that Italian-Canadian

writers emerged as a visible collectivity, thereby making their mark on the Canadian literary scene.

A question arises: Why did Italian-Canadian literature come to being in the latter half of this century[15] when a considerable number of Italians settled in Canada as early as the last century?[16] First, nearly seventy percent of the Italians who came to Canada after World War II originated from the rural regions of the South (Jansen 9). They were uneducated and therefore destined to manual labour in Canada. Filippo Salvatore writes, "Early writers were few, as members of a community of uneducated, immigrant labourers, whose mere survival was a source of constant apprehension, put little stock in breeding poets and intellectuals in large numbers" (35). It was not until the Canadian-educated children and grandchildren of postwar immigrants began to write that Italian-Canadian writing developed into a literary corpus. Furthermore, Italy's allegiance with Germany during the war resulted in the internment of Italians in Canada, and is therefore a contributing factor in the slow evolvement of Italian-Canadian literature. Bruno Ramirez comments on the consequences that Italy's military position had on Italians in Canada:

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[15] The Italian-Canadian literary corpus was formed much later than its American counterpart. On the other hand, Italian-Canadian writers joined forces before the Italian Americans did by forming the Association of Italian Canadian Writers.

[16] For details on Italian immigration to Canada, see Bruno Ramirez's historical study *Les italiens au Canada*. "Ce n'est en effet que vers la fin du siècle que les italiens commencent à arriver massivement au Canada (6). Italian immigration to Canada increases rapidly between 1900 and 1920, then decreases until the late forties: ". . . c'est seulement à partir de la fin des années 1940 que l'émigration italienne au Canada va se transformer en un mouvement important. Entre 1948 et 1972, l'Italie deviendra la seconde source d'immigration canadienne après la Grande-Bretagne (7).

> Passé en jugement, l'ethnicité italienne était trouvée coupable de double allégeance. La peur, l'humiliation et le désarroi, compliqués de divisions internes que la guerre contribua à exacerber, créent des blessures profondes qui nuisent à la vie communautaire et découragent la reprise des activités des associations dans plusieurs communautés italiennes. Il faudra l'arrivée massive de nouveaux immigrants italiens pour transformer le paysage institutionnel et ramener à la vie publique une partie du leadership communautaire d'avant-guerre. (19)

Thus, the psychological harm suffered by Italian-Canadians as a result of the war halted their social and cultural self-expression, thereby affecting their literary production.

Whereas the late seventies brought Italian-Canadian writing together, in the eighties the writers themselves came together at different venues of solidarity. The first major gathering took place in Rome, in 1984, at a conference (Writing About the Italian Immigrant Experience in Canada) which focussed on social history. It is symbolic and appropriate that this first conference should take place in the "old country": it is the return journey which so many Italian-Canadian writers have dealt with in their fiction. For the writers and intellectuals it was beneficial to reconnect with their roots to gain the momentum necessary to evolve as a literary collectivity in Canada.

The papers presented at this conference were published in *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada* (1989), edited by Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino. Two years later, the First

National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers was held in Vancouver, the proceedings of which were published in *Writers in Transition: The Proceedings of the First National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers* (1990), edited by C. Dino Minni and Anna Foschi Ciampolini. In the introduction to *Writers in Transition,* Minni comments on the growth and togetherness which characterized the Vancouver conference compared to that in Rome:

> What *Writers in Transition* cannot show is the spirit of *amicizia,* friendship, which suffused the Vancouver gathering, unlike the Rome conference with its many animated discussions: in just two years the community had matured. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco put it eloquently when he suggested, during one of the seminars, that the villages of the future will be peopled with common interests. We felt like a village. (12)

It was at this conference that the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers (AICW) was formed and the "promise to meet again" was made. The Association, then, has been in existence for over a decade, meeting in different Canadian cities to exchange ideas every two years.[17] In his essay "Why a National Italian-Canadian Writers' Conference?" Minni explains that the word "writer" is interpreted in "the widest possible way to include novelists, poets, playwrights, historians, film makers and critics" (10). In fact, the 1990 conference, held in Montreal, focussed on filmmaking.

The last conference (Toronto, 1996) was held in conjunction

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[17] The conference was held in Toronto in 1988, Ottawa in 1990, Montreal in 1992, Winnipeg in 1994, Toronto in 1996, and it will be held in Vancouver in 1998.

with writers of colour – a sign that joining forces, coalition-building, is the road towards greater recognition. It is expected that if writers from different cultural groups work together, they will gain more strength and visibility in order to eliminate the barriers imposed by the literary mainstream. Just as Italian-Canadian writers felt the need to join forces in the early eighties, the nineties has led different "minority writers" towards the same goal: joining forces in order to increase visibility. The aim is to increase the interest, and particularly the serious study, of "minority writing." As Anthony Tamburri argues, ". . . partial responsibility for the validity or lack thereof of *other* literatures also lies with the *critic* or *theorist*" (13). Recognition by educational and governmental institutions, literary critics and the general population is necessary to give validity to this body of writing. This critical and institutionalized attention exists and is growing, ever so slowly.[18] Why is it that Canadian writers who are not of English or French origin have a harder time being recognized? Why is it that if a writer's name does not sound English or French s/he is classified as an *other* Canadian writer? Why is it necessary to ask the origin of the writer, and then to hyphenate her/him? There is a difference between a writer doing so himself and the mainstream imposing it on her/him.[19] Why does a prolofic

[18] For a list of recent critical texts and literary anthologies, see Christl Verduyn's introduction to *Pulling Together Canadian Literary Pluralities, Journal of Canadian Studies*, 31.3 (1996): 8. See also the following special issues: *Mosaic*, 29.3 (1996) (*Idols of Otherness: The Rhetoric and Reality of Multiculturalism*) and *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 28.3 (1996) (*Literary Theory and Ethnic Minority Writing*).
[19] A writer who "hyphenates" herself/himself is acknowledging her/his heritage and asserting her/his ethnicity. However, when the majority labels a writer as hyphenated, this may be seen (by the writer) as an act of subjugation.

writer such as Frank Paci, for instance, gain attention from the mainstream only after the success of Nino Ricci?[20] My objective here is not to provide answers, but rather to raise these questions as an unacceptable and objectionable part of reality within the Canadian literary scene.

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VI. The Future of Italian-Canadian Literature

The study of Italian-Canadian literature is growing in Canada as well as in Italy. Canadian universities offer courses in Italian-Canadian writing, and graduate students are writing Masters and Doctoral theses. Italian-Canadian writers read their works at public readings and conferences; literary critics and scholars (of Italian origin or not) are increasingly focussing on works by Italian-Canadian writers. Over the last few years, the study of Italian-Canadian literature has also grown in Italy. The fact remains, however, that writers of Italian origin residing outside Italy are not respected or valued for their literary production but rather considered to be marginal, both in Italy and in the country of adoption. Joseph Pivato points to the attitude of condescension held by Italian literary intellectuals, an attitude which has been transferred to professors teaching Italian (literature) outside of Italy: "Many of

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[20] Smaro Kamboureli makes this point in *Making a Difference* (3). Ricci received the Governor General Award for his novel *Lives of the Saints* (1990).

the professors of Italian regard this writing as outside the realm of their serious university teaching and research" ("Italianistica" 238). Yet, despite this visibly negative attitude, there is a growing interest in Italian-Canadian writing in Italy.

In his essay "*Italianistica* Versus Italian-Canadian Writing," Pivato criticizes the negative reception of literature written by Italians residing outside of Italy and argues that this literature should be accepted as Italian literature no matter the language it is written in. He points out that within Italy literary works have been published in numerous dialects as well as in German (in Alto adige) and in French (in Val d'Aosta), thus reflecting the hybrid cultures within the peninsula. Pivato writes,

> If hybrid Italian literature can exist within the borders of Italy in other languages and dialects; then it can exist outside Italy in Italian and in other languages. In Canada Italian literature can exist in standard Italian, in dialects, in English and in French. ("Italianistica" 240)

Of course, if hybrid-Italian literatures across the world were accepted as Italian literature by the literary elite in Italy, they would have a greater reception and visibility. As it is now, literatures such as the Italian-Canadian and the Italian-Australian are considered marginal or minor within Italy and within the "adopted" country. At the university level, the study of Italian-Canadian writing is done either in departments of Italian Language and Literature or in departments of French, English or Comparative Literature. In Canada, Italian-Canadian writers are studied mostly as Canadian/Quebec authors;

and in Italy they are studied as foreign writers in departments of Modern Languages and Foreign Literatures. What Pivato laments is the lack of attention given to Italian-Canadian writing (no matter the language of publication) by Italian departments in Italy and in Canada. The question which arises is whether these works belong in the Italian literature curriculum. I would argue that works published in Italian are more likely to belong to Italian literature than those published in English or French. The fact remains, however, that Italian-Canadian writing can claim to belong to several canons of literature, and this "flexibility/adaptability" is partially responsible for its marginality within these canons. Italian-Canadian writing remains in limbo, always at the in-between stage. We must not forget that this writing is influenced by the dominant culture in Canada while at the same time linked to the culture of the heritage country.

Because Italian-Canadian literature does not have a specific literary tradition, "The Italian-Canadian writer often finds himself or herself in conflict with both the artistic tradition of the Old World and the expectations of the New" (Pivato, "Nothing Left to Say" 33). It is this sense of not belonging artistically which motivates many Italian-Canadian writers to associate with the Canadian literary mainstream: "there is a fear of having no real context against which to measure their work; there is a sense of heading towards oblivion unless they anchor themselves in the English mainstream" (Pivato, "Nothing Left to Say" 33). Pivato condemns this and makes the connection between children of immigrants who deny their roots in

favour of the majority, a trend which is often depicted and criticized by the writers themselves in their creative work. Pivato says that the writers are doing the same thing on an intellectual and literary level: "having seen and deplored this monumental betrayal they remain blind to their own sell-out, their readiness to deny or downplay their essential differences in order to gain acceptability with the English majority" ("Nothing Left to Say" 33). Some Italian-Canadian writers, however, do not aim to join the literary mainstream, but rather opt for the "writer-as-exile" status: "Are not the distinctive qualities of some Italian writing derived from the outsider perspective? The writer-as-exile is a convention for some authors; for many Italian Canadians it is a real experience" (Pivato, "Nothing Left to Say" 35).

Given the growing interest in Canada and in Italy, it is appropriate to consider where Italian-Canadian literature is headed. There seem to be two schools of thought. The first is that Italian-Canadian literature is "a fleeting phenomenon" which will die out and simply become Canadian literature; the second is that it will continue to grow and reach new heights as Italian-Canadian literature. Susan Iannucci argues the following:

> Italo-Canadian writing is circumscribed by time. It is the product of a moment in a writer's life, and that moment vanishes.
>
> Some continue to write after the Italo-Canadian stage has worn itself out, and these we simply call Canadian writers. It is not that they cease to be of Italian origin. But they carry that heritage with them the way other Canadians carry the fact

> that they come from Toronto rather than Vancouver or a farm rather than a city. Italy filters through in past tenses; their present is Canadian. (225-6)

Thus, Iannucci categorizes Italian-Canadian writers into two groups: for the first, writing is "an outlet, a way of resolving the angst associated with their transplantation" (225); the second continues to write but Italy and related themes "recede to the margins of their pages" (225). In *Writers in Transition,* C. Dino Minni echoes Iannucci's words:

> Personally, I think that those authors who wrote simply as a catharsis will cease to write; their inspiration will exhaust itself with the exhaustion of their raw materials. . . . Others, instead, have already made (or are in the process of making) the transition to something else. (9-10)

Pasquale Verdicchio, on the other hand, strongly disagrees with Iannucci's statement:

> Such a questionable conclusion is strongly based on the belief that ethnicity or cultural identity is something discernible in themes and subject matter, and that once explicit treatment of certain themes becomes invisible they have been surpassed or overcome. ("Subalterns Abroad" 215)

Verdicchio suggests, and rightly so, that a writer's ethnicity is a sensibility which will come through in the writing even if specific ethnic themes have been outgrown by the writer.

Joseph Pivato argues against the notion that Italian-Canadian writing is a passing phenomenon, a notion which he points out is

adhered to by the writers themselves as well as by some academics who doubt the "viability of studying something called Italian-Canadian writing" ("Nothing Left to Say" 27). The writers' fear is influenced by a double sense of inferiority which, according to Pivato, originates from being Canadian and from being an immigrant. Pivato believes that Italian-Canadian literature will "survive and flourish, whether it is part of the literary mainstream or not" (35) because this writing is "part of a new world literature, the literature of migration" ("Nothing Left to Say" 37).

With the constantly increasing yearly output of scholarly essays, novels, poetry and anthologies, it is difficult to imagine that Italian-Canadian literature will simply die out. Forthcoming in the next few months are two anthologies of Italian-Canadian writing: Joseph Pivato's *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing,* a collection of works from Bressani to the present; and Marisa De Franceschi's *Pillars of Lace,* a collection of writing by Italian-Canadian women. The literary production of Italian-Canadian writers and the critical essays on Italian-Canadian writing is booming. Linda Hutcheon writes that "Doubleness . . . is the essence of the immigrant experience. Caught between two worlds, the immigrant negotiates a new social space; caught between two cultures and often languages, the writer negotiates a new literary space" (9). The Italian-Canadian writer is indeed negotiating "a new literary space" within Canadian literature. I would argue that fiction by Canadian writers of Italian descent will continue to illustrate, to varying degrees, "the Italian" as well as "the Canadian" because, as Pivato says, they will never stop

discovering their new and old worlds: "they will spend a lifetime working out the many ways in which [their immigrant experience] has infiltrated their perception of the world around them, altered forever the way they see and experience life in North America" ("Nothing Left to Say" 39).

Italian-Canadian writing is the "result of historical events through which immigrant writing persists, evolves, and makes itself felt in the society at large" (Verdicchio, "Subalterns Abroad" 222). The arrival of immigrants in Canada from across the world has played a major role in the constant need to redefine the Canadian identity. Likewise, the literary production of these immigrants and of their children has made a substantial contribution to the Canadian literary scene. Italian-Canadian literature, as many other hyphenated literatures, will eventually be unobjectionably accepted as Canadian literature.

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VII. Towards Canonization?

The debate on the canonization of Canadian literature and the consequences of canon-adjustment is ongoing.[21] It has been argued

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[21] See Robert Lecker's "The Canonization of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry into Value"; Frank Davey's "Critical Response I: Canadian Canons"; Lecker's "Critical Response II: Response to Frank Davey"; and Tracy Ware's "A Little Self-Consciousness Is a Dangerous Thing: A Response to Robert Lecker." For essays on the canon and the curriculum see *English Studies in Canada*, 17.4 (1991), especially Robert Martin's "Dryden's Dates: Reflections on Canons, Curricula, and Pedagogy" and Robert Moore's "Reading Between the Canon and the Curriculum: Issues of Legibility and Legitimacy."

that the canon and the curriculum are separate entities and that the latter, to use Robert Moore's words, is "the locus of reform" for the former. Why is it that certain texts are accepted as part of the canon and others, just as worthy, are not? Is it more important for a writer/text to be in the curriculum rather than in the canon? Italian-Canadian literature is not represented in the Canadian literary canon. In fact, this body of writing is virtually unknown to those outside the field of ethnic minority literature. The only exception, perhaps, is Nino Ricci. This lack of visibility is surprising given the Italian-Canadian population and its literary production. In the latest AICW (Association of Italian Canadian Writers) Newsletter, Caterina Edwards paraphrases Douglas Gibson (editor-in-chief of McClelland & Stewart) as having said that "he was surprised that considering the number of Italian immigrants to Canada, particularly Toronto, the Italians had produced no equivalent body of work" (Edwards, "Are Italian-Canadian Writers Just Not Measuring Up?" 16). Gibson was comparing Italian-Canadians to other ethnic writers such as Rohinton Mistry and Larissa Lai. Edwards goes on to say that Gibson "actually stated that we [Italian-Canadian writers] were not up to the standards of the other groups" (17).

The five writers included in this thesis have been received differently by Canadians and the Canadian literary institution. Nino Ricci, of course, became known after having received the Governor General's award for his first novel, *Lives of the Saints*. Frank Paci, who has published seven novels, owes his recent visibility to Ricci's success. Mary Melfi, too, has published several volumes of poetry, a

play and a novel but is relatively unknown. Caterina Edwards, despite her literary talent, is mostly known in western Canada. Antonio D'Alfonso has published poetry, prose fiction and critical essays in English and in French. He is known in Quebec because of his publications in French, but it is surprising that he is not better known as a fiction writer in English Canada given that he has been instrumental in rendering the literature of Italian Canadians, and other ethnic minority writers, visible through Guernica Editions.

All five writers are well known within the Italian-Canadian literary circle and perhaps slightly beyond in the field of ethnic minority writing but, with the exception of Ricci, they are virtually unknown in Canadian literary studies. Are these writers part of the canon? Of course not. Do they belong on the curriculum? I would say that they do. Needless to say, one is more likely to see Ricci's name on a university reading list than the others'. If and when Paci, Melfi, Edwards and D'Alfonso appear on university course lists, it is mainly because of the professor's affinity for Italian-Canadian writing or in special interest seminars. In other words, their works are not studied in Canadian Literature 101 because they do not have official recognition.

I would like to see the works of Italian-Canadian writers, and specifically the fiction of Paci, Melfi, Edwards, D'Alfonso and Ricci, studied in Canadian literature programs. I want them to be acknowledged as Canadian writers because they are Canadian, either by birth or by adoption, and they write about a Canadian experience. It is not simply a question of adding them to the canon for, as

Antonio D'Alfonso writes, "what is 'mainstream canonicity' if not the artificial repetition of names and life styles" (*In Italics* 16). These writers need and deserve more visibility in order for their literary talent to be acknowledged and appreciated. They belong on the Canadian literature curriculum; they should be studied in university if not in high school. As D'Alfonso argues, "What is wrong and constitutes an act of censorship is the way the educational system and the mass media choose to underline only certain works without ever mentioning, let alone offering students a chance to discover and study, other lesser known works" (*In Italics* 16). The presence of Italian-Canadian texts, and other lesser known ethnic minority texts, on the curriculum would reflect the social, cultural and literary changes that have occurred in our country in the last two decades. These works of fiction may not and need not become part of the traditional canon. They already belong to a canon by the very fact that they do not belong to the traditional canon.

Chapter Two: The Narrated Italian-Canadian Identity

Joseph Pivato writes that "Any analysis of ethnic origin necessarily raises questions of identity" (*Echo* 104). Each novel under study in this thesis *is* an "analysis of ethnic origin," specifically that of Italianness. From the earliest novel (Frank Paci's *The Italians*, 1978) to the most recent (Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion*, 1995), the conflicts and the consequences associated with the Italian immigrant background are exposed and analysed. And, to confirm Pivato's statement, it is virtually impossible to read these texts without seeing the issues of identity and ethnic origin as intrinsically linked. In fact, although the writers may have chosen different forms of expression, each novel can be read as a quest for identity.

This chapter discusses the conflicts and tension inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity as represented in the depiction of subjectivity and agency. An individual's identity constantly needs to be defined given that it is subject to repeated shifting. The novels discussed, and the passages analysed, in the following pages illustrate the duality of the Italian-Canadian identity or, to use Paci's words, "the teetering between two worlds." The "push and pull" experienced by the children of immigrants is both external and internal. The external forces include the pressure from their parents to remain faithful to their Italian heritage as represented by the family and the community that they inhabit; and the resistance from the Canadian mainstream that they aspire towards. The internal forces include the personal need to act freely in attempting to find an

equilibrium between their Italianness and their Canadianness and the guilt which results from this.

The quest for identity is essentially the path undertaken by characters, usually the protagonists in the novels, towards becoming a better, more complete self. It is this "journey home" which enables her/him to answer the question "Who am I?" The path towards "home" involves finding a way to negotiate the conflicting components that makeup her/his identity: the Italian roots – where and who s/he comes from – and the Canadian space that s/he inhabits. As Marino Tuzi writes, "ethnic subjects can only reconstitute a sense of self by coming to grips with their cultural multiplicity" (20). The process towards finding the self includes the following steps: rejection of the Italian heritage and yearning to be accepted by Canadians; emotional and psychological ambivalence resulting from feelings of guilt and/or feelings of nonbelonging to either Italianness or Canadianness; accepting Italianness as an integral component of her/his cultural makeup; and reaching a negotiation between Italianness and Canadianness. The duality and ambiguity experienced by the protagonist is the result of the effects of deterritorialization passed on to the children by their immigrant parents. The quest for identity presented in each of the novels is simultaneously a consequence of deterritorialization and a process towards reterritorialization: finding a way to belong, making a space for herself/himself within the Canadian reality.

For the most part, the texts under study can be seen as variants of the Bildungsroman – the novel of education or upbringing. I

emphasize "variants" because they are not specifically faithful to the tradition of the Bildungsroman; that is, they are not a linear account of the hero's development from childhood to adulthood in the way that George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is, for example. Perhaps one exception is Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House*, especially if it is read in conjunction with his first novel in the trilogy, *Lives of the Saints. In a Glass House* outlines Vittorio Innocente's upbringing from the moment he arrives in Canada (at age seven) to his departure for Africa where he has found work as an English teacher.

The other novels deal with the development towards maturity, but the process occurs in adulthood while remembering events from childhood. These references to the past are invariably linked to, and perhaps responsible for, the identity crises presented in the texts. In *The Italians*, Frank Paci's first novel, the author chooses to show the development towards maturity undergone by three siblings: Lorianna, Aldo, and Bill. This is done by dedicating specific chapters to each of the characters.

Three other novels under discussion – Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth*, Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* and Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* – are more specifically linked to the Künstlerroman, the novel which shows the development of the artist from childhood to maturity. *The Lion's Mouth* deals with Bianca's need to write; *Infertility Rites* is about Nina's struggle to assert herself as a painter; and *Fabrizio's Passion* illustrates Fabrizio's ambitions as a filmmaker. Yet again, these novels do not follow the Künstlerroman tradition closely given that they do not

show the linear development of the artist from childhood to maturity. The childhood experience is revealed, however, through recollections of the past, that is, through memory.

The term identity refers to "the distinguishing personality of an individual." A person's identity is the sum total of the responses to the following questions: Who am I? What am I? What is it that makes me me (and not someone else)? These questions appear to be very simple ones. However, for the individual who is born in one country and transplanted to another, it is often difficult to give a definite answer. One of the ways in which the Italian-Canadian novel addresses these questions is through characterization. For example, in *Infertility Rites* the question of identity mainly revolves around Nina DiFiore. After having immigrated to Canada as a young child, Nina spends most of her childhood and adolescence trying to become Canadian. As a result, Nina does not know who she is. She cannot answer the question "What is it that makes me me?" because she has spent most of her life "pretending to be . . . somebody else" (38). In her mind, in order to be Canadian it is necessary to deny whatever refers back to her Italian roots. Consequently, as an adult she undergoes an identity crisis when she realizes that she can no longer deny her Italianness.

The novels under study in this thesis suggest that the identities of the children of immigrants are "constructed out of a spectrum of social and cultural variables. Shifting in and out of diverse social contexts, the characters play several interconnected and often conflicting roles" (Tuzi 31). Eventually, the Italian-

Canadian individual, such as Nina DiFiore, realizes that "the socially-produced identity" is no longer valid and s/he must reevaluate her/his Italianness in order to know who s/he really is:

> . . . the characters question the legitimacy and value of particular social roles that have been foisted on them by parts of mainstream society and the Italian Canadian community, or which they have chosen for themselves as a way to resolve their identity crisis. (Tuzi 31)

The issue of identity can only be resolved when the character realizes that her/his self is composed of "the Italian" and "the Canadian."

When dealing with immigrant issues, the question of identity raises other more specific questions related to those mentioned above. The question "Who am I?" can only be answered tentatively until the other two – What am I? and What is it that makes me me? – have been dealt with. When asking "What am I?" it is essential for the immigrant to respond on the basis of the cultures that he is touched by. For the most part, the novels being studied here deal with two cultures: English-Canadian and Italian outside of Italy. However, *Fabrizio's Passion* is the exception to this given that it deals with a third culture: the French-Québecois. To the question "What am I?" Nina DiFiore answers "Canadian." This, of course, is an incomplete answer because "Canadian" only refers to one component of her cultural identity. And, that is why she is unable to answer the first question "Who am I?" Fabrizio Notte, on the other hand, is very aware of the multiple cultures which are part of

his daily existence. For instance, he distinguishes between the three names given to his city, each of which refers back to the three cultures that he is touched by: Montreal (English), Montréal (French) and Monreale (Italian). Fabrizio, the narrator of this passage, says:

> Monreale confers on to me the privilege of being three persons in one. Being a strange combination of three cultures, I was able to converge my three views of this city and form a completely unique triangular (*tripartite*) worldview . . . (212)

Thus, Fabrizio's city gives him three different perspectives because he can translate or interpret it (the city as an entity, not just its name) into three languages.

Given that identity and the self are the focus of the novels being studied, it is not surprising that four of the seven texts are confessional and use the first-person narrator. Ideally, a person grows up, has experiences, and reaches a certain maturity as an adult. By then, he has a good sense of self, a definite answer to the question "Who am I?" But in the case of Vittorio Innocente (*In a Glass House*), Nina DiFiore (*Infertility Rites*), Fabrizio Notte (*Fabrizio's Passion*) and Stephen Mancuso (*The Father*), to name a few, they have reached adulthood without having matured completely. There are still many questions left unanswered pertaining to the self: Who am I? Why am I like this? Where do I come from? Where am I headed? Where is home? The inability to answer these questions stems from the character's unwillingness, or incapability, of reconciling with her/his ethnic roots. The last question (Where is home?) is particularly important because it

seems that the answer to this question is the key to the quest for identity. Nina DiFiore feels lost because she is unrooted: "Home? Where can that be? In one's childish memories?" (*Infertility Rites* 31). Once "home" has been established there is a sense of closure in the individual's search for self. Locating "home" usually involves bridging the gap that has been created between Italy and Canada and their respective cultures. The narratives under discussion reveal a maturing process which could not have been fulfilled earlier because the character had refused to ask/answer the questions pertaining to the self. The reason for this is that s/he had refused to either acknowledge or accept her/his immigrant roots as part of the self. For immigrants, and particularly their children, there are options to dealing with their heritage. They can either accept it as part of their cultural makeup, and in exceptional cases be proud of it as is Mary's case in *Infertility Rites*. Or, they can deny it and attempt to erase it by eliminating all elements pertaining to their heritage, as Marie does in *Black Madonna*. Inevitably, the second option leaves a sense of discomfort because one's roots cannot be erased completely. It is the character's fixation about being different, as emphasized by the Canadian mainstream, and her/his vain attempts at erasing this difference that prevents her/him from having a sense of self, from becoming whole. In order to know oneself, one must first learn about, understand and accept one's origins. As C. Dino Minni admits in "Reflecting Today's Ethnic Reality": "I had to travel back to my Italian roots, to define my identity as an artist, before I could find my place in the Canadian

mosaic" (198). The importance of the "journey home" that Minni needed to experience is the key message in the Italian-Canadian novels under study.

Italian-Canadian fiction, like other immigrant fiction, deals with coping with (the awareness of one's) otherness. Otherness or difference refers to that something which distinguishes an individual from a group, a small community from the population of a country, or a minority from the majority. "Otherness" is not negative in itself, but is often seen as such by the mainstream and those "others" who want to be part of that mainstream. The writers and the texts under study have roots which are elsewhere (Italy) than the here and now (Canada), and are therefore set apart in some way from the group in power. Thus, otherness only exists when the newcomer, or her/his descendent, is compared to (or compares herself/himself to) the group in power, the majority. And when that awareness begins s/he feels uncomfortable within the smaller nucleus of the family and the Italian immigrant community as well. When the immigrant, and specifically the child of immigrants, detaches herself/himself from the immigrant nucleus, then that sense of otherness reappears in the inverse: s/he feels "other" in her/his community of origin, as Marie does in *Black Madonna*. Therein lies the inability to determine where "home" is.

* * * * *

I. Rejecting the Italian Heritage

Marie Barone (*Black Madonna*) is the epitome of otherness for she sees herself as "other" in Canadian society and in her parents' home. Canadian-born, Marie is raised in a very tight family nucleus within an Italian neighbourhood in Sault Ste. Marie. At a very young age she begins to feel the humiliation caused by her immigrant background and struggles to detach herself from her Italianness. Her disdain for her roots, that which dictates that she is "other," is such that she is a "foreigner" and a "visitor" in her parents' home: "Marie thought of herself as a foreigner in her own house" (66). Her room is her space – her refuge from the rest of the family. She is very critical of her family and of Italians in general. She does not fit in with her Italian friends in the Italian neighbourhood. Rita Giunti, "her last remaining friend in the neighbourhood" (30), is presented as a foil to Marie. Rita has made a conscious decision to "accommodate" the Italians. She has opted to stay in the Sault to go to university, and her ambitions are traditional: a husband and kids. Rita is the kind of daughter that Assunta Barone, Marie's mother, would have liked. Instead, she thinks her own daughter an *ingrata* (ungrateful). Marie only hangs out with Rita, essentially tolerates her just as she does all Italians, because she is unable to penetrate the sphere of the more popular (English-Canadian) girls:

> Rita was actually too Italian . . . Marie would've discarded her long before, except that she was finding it hard to make friends

> with the more popular girls at Collegiate. With their unquestioning sense of themselves and their cliquishness they made such a formidable group. And she was too proud to fall into line by playing up to them. (30)

Ironically, this sense of pride which prevents her from playing up to them is put aside later on in life when she negates her origins in order to become Canadian. Once "Canadian," Marie plays up her Italian origins to get a teaching job in an Italian neighbourhood in Toronto. This kind of contradiction and swerving is evidence that Marie has no sense of who she really is. But, of course, she fails to see the ambiguity of her actions.

Marie struggles to pull herself out of the Italian sphere, but there is pressure from within and without to push her back; that is, her parents try to keep her within their Italian nucleus and the Canadian mainstream prevents her from entering its sphere by pushing her back within that same traditional immigrant sphere. For Marie, the dilemma is resolved by leaving the Sault. In a new setting, Toronto, Marie can conceal her ethnic origins (Marie Barone, "silent e") and be accepted into the English-Canadian sphere. Marie believes that her new identity is made possible only by negating her background. Her boyfriend Richard, whom she later marries, knows very little of her life as an Italian in the Sault:

> She had given only the barest of essentials on her background. She simply didn't want him to see that side of her. It had very little to do with her anymore. Apart from her periodic visits

> and a few phone calls, she had severed all connections with that world. (110)

The periodic visits, however, are a source of extreme frustration and internal conflict due to the two selves – Marie the English-Canadian academic and Marie the Italian daughter – coming together.

The move from the Sault to Toronto reflects the move from childhood to adulthood. But the reverse is also true when she goes from Toronto to the Sault because "her old world could reduce her to a child again" (105). Marie can hold on to her "adult status" through deceit: towards Richard certainly, but more importantly towards herself. It is because she has reached a false sense of maturity, through denial of her background (the Sault, her family and her Italian origins), that she is quickly reduced to "a child" when she returns to the Sault and to her family. Paci's message, I think, like Melfi's in *Infertility Rites,* is that denying a part of the self – in this case one's Italianness – leads to an identity crisis. For the Italian-Canadian, it is essential to deal with and to understand her/his roots in order to answer the question "Who am I?" This is reinforced by the presence of a secondary character, Annalise Belsito. Paci's presentation of Marie is constantly interrupted by Annalise's story. Through Annalise, Paci foreshadows the route that Marie will have taken by the end of the novel in her quest for identity: the "journey home" necessitates an internal reconciliation with her roots.

Otherness is very much imprinted at the level of the self, thus provoking an internal conflict. As Joseph Pivato writes, "When we

bring together two different cultures, comparisons are inevitable and we become aware of the sense of otherness" (*Echo* 121). Otherness stems from the inability to reconcile the old world with the new, the Italianness and the Canadianness which are both a part of the self. Marie's sense of otherness, for instance, is first provoked by certain markers of difference which are external. It is then reinforced and sustained not only by the dominant group but also by the immigrant group. The most evident markers include clothing, food, religion, physical features, setting and language. These markers of difference can be categorized as changeable and unchangeable. Clothing and food can easily be changed. In *Fabrizio's Passion,* for example, Fabrizio does not want to eat Italian fresh homemade pasta because it's too soggy; he would rather eat pasta that comes "in cellophane bags" (62) bought at the grocery store. At school, Fabrizio trades his meat sandwich for a peanut butter sandwich: he wants to eat his Quebecois schoolmate's lunch.

In *Black Madonna,* Marie "stopped eating Italian food altogether. Later it wasn't only Italian food, but anything having to do with her mother's particular dishes" (100). Marie sheds her pudginess when she goes away to university. She undergoes a drastic physical change: she becomes very thin, almost anorexic. The shedding of weight is symbolic of her wanting to detach herself from her Italian heritage which gives importance to food intake. As an adolescent Marie stops going to church despite her mother's insistence. In fact, she stops attending mass to spite her mother, because she knows that it is an important part of her mother's

heritage. As Pivato writes, "Marie Barone is self destructive in her attempt to escape the immigrant family and all things Italian" (*Echo* 215).

A person's physical features are unchangeable markers of difference. Marie (*Black Madonna*), Stephen (*The Father*) and Nina (*Infertility Rites*) are very critical of their black hair and dark complexion which immediately point to their Italian roots. Nina feels that "in this colony of fair-skinned Anglo-Saxons" she is "as incongruous as a manual typewriter in a computer store" (*Infertility Rites* 55). Nina believes that because her cousin Dora is a natural blonde she has an easier time penetrating the social mainstream. The protagonists presented in the novels under study, children of immigrants, strive to eliminate the markers of difference in order to belong to the social mainstream. They fail to understand, however, that even if they succeed in erasing traces of their immigrant roots, they must address the internal sense of otherness which they have incorporated into their identity. In other words, they need to change their attitude towards themselves instead of focussing on what they think the mainstream wants them to become.

In his novels, set in Sault Ste. Marie and in Toronto, Frank Paci highlights setting as a marker of difference. Italian parents in general are aware that the anti-Italian and pro-Canadian attitude which motivates their offspring results in their abandoning the old neighbourhood. Marie's father says about the children of Italian parents: "As soon as they get enough money to buy a house in the East End. They move away from their parents. They don't want to

do with their parents anymore, hey. They become *English* . . ." (*Black Madonna* 66). The West End is the old neighbourhood where most first-generation Italian immigrants settled. It represents the old world. The East End is the richer, newer neighbourhood populated mostly by English Canadians and just starting to attract the adult children of immigrants. The shift from one neighbourhood to the other is symbolic of the second generation's attempt to rid itself of that which is Italian in order to become Canadian. Marie despises the West End neighbourhood:

> As she walked home from school, the very sight of the familiar buildings and the derelict houses was repugnant. It was as if she were walking back in time, while she was so anxious to burst out of her old skin and emerge totally new. She had something of a chance to spread her wings at school, but when she went back home it was the same old thing. She crept around like a bug. (67)

This passage is very revealing because it illustrates how, according to Marie and by extension the second generation, Italianness – as represented by the neighbourhood and the family – prevents progress. School, on the other hand, which represents the new world – Canadianness – is an opportunity for Marie to go forward. The comparison with the bug points to the humiliation and lack of self-worth Marie feels in the old world environment.

The same movement from one neighbourhood to the other occurs in *The Father*: Maddalena insists on leaving the West End. When she finally succeeds in transferring her home as well as the

new modern bakery to the newer non-immigrant neighbourhood, the business is successful but the family collapses. Oreste cannot adapt to the new neighbourhood; he can no longer make bread with his own hands in the new bakery and, therefore, begins to lose himself in alcohol. Tuzi points out that "traditional Italian masculinity is devalued in an urban-technological environment where the man experiences a loss of status" (19). The more Maddalena becomes successful, the more Oreste goes downhill as if his wife's success where an affront to his manhood. Maddalena is so much a part of Canadian modernization, and Oreste is so dejected at having the influence of Canadianness invade his family as well as his bakery that there is no communication between husband and wife, no common ground to stand on. In this novel Paci uses the first generation to illustrate the conflict between the two worlds and the extreme consequences which result when no attempt at negotiation is made.

In *Infertility Rites,* Nina buys a house (with her English-Canadian husband) away from her parents' neighbourhood – one more way of distancing herself from her roots. Likewise, Nina's best friend Mary moves to a neighbourhood which has the "highest average family income in Canada" (93). Mary's motivation, however, is different from Nina's because she convinces her parents to move down the street. Mary moves to a better neighbourhood because her financial success allows her to; but, at the same time, she wants to share her well-being with her parents. Mary is the well-rounded Italian-Canadian: Canadian by birth and education, and

proud of her Italian origins. The fact that Mary "has it all" has something to do with her ability to bring together both components of her bicultural identity. Nina, on the other hand, is disppointed when she realizes that the path that she has undertaken – becoming an "exemplary Wasp" (32) and marrying "Mr. Middle-Class America" (41) – does not lead to success. Mary is presented late in the narrative as the "success story" which contrasts with Nina's "failure." Melfi's message is similar to Paci's: in order to be "successful" and fulfilled, personally and professionally, it is important to have a good sense of self. For the Italian-Canadian, this involves acknowledging her/his Italianness and negotiating it with her/his Canadianness.

* * * * *

II. Language Conflicts: The Second Generation[22]

In the novels under study, language is presented as the most relevant marker of difference – that which causes conflict between the two polar worlds. Characters (Marie, Nina, Stephen) in the novels discussed attempt to distance themselves from their Italianness by refusing to learn/speak Italian. This results in limited communication between the two generations: the parents speak little or no English and the children, if they speak Italian at all, speak

[22] In my discussion I treat Vittorio (*In a Glass House*) and Nina (*Infertility Rites*) as part of the second generation. Although these characters were born in Italy, they arrived in Canada at a very young age and are Canadian educated.

an Italian baby language. In *Fabrizio's Passion*, for instance, Fabrizio speaks French to his father who responds in Italian.

Furthermore, the children modify their names to make them sound less Italian "as a way to express their allegiance to Canadian society" (Tuzi 24). This is particularly visible in C. Dino Minni's short story "El Dorado" where Rocco Sebastiano becomes Rocky Sebastian in order to get a job (*Other Selves* 48). Likewise, in the novels under study, Maria Barone calls herself Marie Barone (silent "e"), Fabrizio shortens to Fabi, Vittorio becomes Victor, and Stefano translates into Stephen. It is through contact with the mainstream that these characters realize they have a choice. In *The Father*, for instance, Stephen's teacher asks what he'd like to be called, Stefano or Stephen: ". . . when asked the question it suddenly dawned on him that he had a choice—and choosing gave him a great sense of satisfaction. From now on he was going to be Stephen" (69).

Both Marie Barone (*Black Madonna*) and Nina DiFiore (*Infertility Rites*) hate everything that is associated to the Italian world; this of course includes the Italian language and its dialects. Marie hates it when those around her speak Italian; she prefers to speak English or not to speak at all because the Italian language is a strong indicator of her otherness. She, therefore, does not associate with friends of the family:

> If neighbourhood friends arrived to see her parents, she'd immediately go up to her room and close the door, not even bothering to say hello. Her radio, if turned loud enough, just

> managed to drown out the exuberant and sickening Italian voices. (66)

The Italian words spoken sicken her, just like her mother's food does. The image of the voices being drowned is a very appropriate one because it reflects Marie's struggle to drown the Italian person within her in order to pull out a Canadian person.

* * * * *

Language, as the spoken word, is extremely important as a marker of difference because it is a key element in the quest for identity. The ability to communicate with someone comes from being able to speak the same language. Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* merits a detailed analysis given that specific passages illustrate very clearly the relationship between language and difference. Vittorio Innocente realizes that he is perceived as "different" when he sees that the Italian language identifies him as such. It is worthwhile noting that Ricci could have written a similar scene by using clothing, for example, as a marker of difference. The fact that he chooses not to shows the importance of language as a marker of difference and as a source of conflict. Clothing can easily be changed – it does not define a person. But language, especially the mother tongue, is an undeniable component of one's identity. It too can be changed, but there will always be some "residue" left over. Vittorio's first ride on the schoolbus is an initiation to the new world. As the bus goes along its route, moving from the

rural area towards the town where the school is located, Vittorio feels as if he had "suddenly entered a new country, with its own different unknown customs and average citizens." (47) Until then Vittorio had been secluded at the farm and had not had any contact with non-Italians. At this point he is very naive and unaware of his state of difference. Thus, his last name – Innocente (which means innocent or naive) – is particularly appropriate. His entering a "new country" geographically is a physical manifestation of his awakening to his state of otherness. Vittorio's first ride on the schoolbus is of particular importance because it marks his transformation from the state of innocence to his awakening and realization that he is different – he does not belong.

Prior to this moment Vittorio's only experience with otherness had been through his half-sister Rita who, according to Vittorio's father and relatives, does not belong to the family. Rita's presence in the Innocente home is merely tolerated because she is the consequence of her mother's affair. Following the death of her mother, Rita's only link to the Innocente family is through her half-brother Vittorio. He seems to realize this because he takes special care of her and tries to prevent her from feeling her difference. Vittorio, however, had never envisaged himself as being other. The bus ride sets in motion a long process which will cause Vittorio to become a certain kind of individual: one who is detached and who does not belong on many levels – emotional, familial and social. This will eventually lead to his physical and geographical dislocation when he moves to Africa.

An older boy sits next to Vittorio on the bus: "he made some comment to me that I couldn't follow, that I hoped had simply been some sort of greeting. But when I didn't respond he spoke again, his face twisted now, mocking or angry" (49). When the boy asks him if he is *Italiano,* Vittorio's immediate reaction is that of "clutching at the familiar word" (49). The boy says that he and other boys sitting at the back of the bus are *paesani.* Literally the word *paesani* refers to people who come from the same village, and therefore suggests friendship. Vittorio's false sense of newly found friendship is quickly destroyed when the boys make fun of him by playing with his lunch:

> The black-haired boy took the lunchbox from me and held it before him as if to admire it. Then finally he opened it and unwrapped one of the sandwiches inside, split it open, brought it to his nose to sniff it. He screwed up his face. . . . The sandwich began to pass from hand to hand. The other boys sniffed it as well, clutching their throats, pretending to swoon in the aisle. Finally one of them glanced quickly up to the front of the bus, then slipped the sandwich out through an open window. (49-50)

When Vittorio tries to prevent the boys from doing the same to the second sandwich in his lunchbox, the black-haired boy punches him: "his fist caught the side of my head hard three times in quick succession, my head pounding against the glass of the window beside me" (50). What Vittorio had mistaken for friendship is in fact a lesson on the hierarchy of the seating arrangements on the

schoolbus, but more importantly it is an initiation to his sense of otherness. Vittorio now knows that he is not one of those who belongs: he is different.

Later, Vittorio's difference is further accentuated when he is "forced" to sit beside George, the school idiot whom all the kids make fun of. Vittorio cannot bring himself to be like the other children: he is unable to ridicule George. Therefore, he feels that the children link him to George:

> I knew my failure [to make fun of George] made me seem more like George to the others, even made me, in a way, more despicable than he was, because George was protected at least by the severity of his strangeness, had no one beneath him whom the others expected him to make fun of. (51-2)

Although it is another form of otherness from George's, Vittorio is definitely aware of his difference in the eyes of those around him. This feeling is the cause of extreme humiliation which is imprinted within him and which will be a dominant characteristic of his personality. His first teacher, Sister Bertram, who constantly picks on him because he is slower than the other students (mainly due to the language difficulty), is also responsible for feeding his sense of difference: ". . . her anger would seem to focus in on me like a light beam, as if she were inviting the other children to see how different they were from me" (54).

Contrary to what one might think, most of the students who make fun of Vittorio are not part of the anglophone majority. They are sons of immigrants like Vittorio but, because they or their

parents arrived first, they think themselves superior. They can afford to humiliate him just as they perhaps had been humiliated.[23] A year later, when his cousins arrive from Italy, Vittorio is in turn in a position of superiority. He intends to make them experience the same humiliation that he had felt. Vittorio cannot tolerate their visible difference:

> Their first months at school I spent bitter with the shame of them, couldn't bear sitting with them on the bus, always got on after them so I could choose a place away from them, couldn't bear the sounds of their voices or how they walked or how they looked . . . (64)

Vittorio goes as far as pushing his cousin Domenic to the ground to make him understand that he shouldn't wait around for him at recess:

> I simply pushed him hard against the wall of the school to be away from him, *feeling a lightness as my hands shot out against him as if something caged in me had been set free.* But there was a look in his face just before he crumpled to the ground, a grimace like a soundless scream, that seemed not so much pain as a sudden understanding of how things were between us. I felt betrayed somehow, in that instant and then afterwards when other kids sided with him when the teacher on duty came, *felt I'd been tricked into thinking he was nothing,* that I could release my hate on him without

[23] Pasquale Verdicchio makes the point that this is a socio-historical reality. (See "Subalterns Abroad" 223, Note 5).

> consequence. Later when he'd begun to make other friends, to avoid me, every small success of his seemed an accusation. (my italics, 65-6)

This passage is important because it illustrates how in attempting to belong, Vittorio finds himself betrayed by the very group that he tries to become a part of – for example, the students and the teacher. Somehow, Vittorio is under the impression that humiliating his cousin will free him from his own sense of humiliation. This was what the other children expected him to do to George, the school idiot. In reality Vittorio has alienated his cousin for nothing because he is condemned even further. He feels "tricked": he had only behaved in this way because he believed that it was expected of him. His strategy works against him given that Domenic makes friends while Vittorio remains a loner who is uncomfortable in his own skin.

Similarly, when the scene on the bus repeats itself with the cousins, Vittorio looks forward to watching them being humiliated. Yet the result is surprising: the cousins fight back. They stand their ground so much so that the bullies are forced to befriend them. Vittorio is disappointed – his revenge is somehow denied him: "In all this I was left with nothing, no reward for trying to follow out what seemed the careful, ruthless logic of fitting in" (65). In following the code of behaviour in order to belong, Vittorio feels betrayed when he realizes that even then he does not fit in. Ironically, the cousins soon belong to a group whereas he remains alone, his difference emphasized once again. He is unable to decode

the "careful, ruthless logic of fitting in." Ricci, I think, is suggesting that there is something fundamentally wrong at the core of Vittorio's self.

Thus, *In a Glass House* points to the fact that although difference is rendered visible by external forces, the individual's internal strength can refuse to be intimidated by it. The cousins are able to withstand humiliation; they are not disturbed by their otherness because they do not acknowledge it. Vittorio, however, lacks that internal strength, that sense of complete self. This results in constant humiliation which he carries

> . . . like an open sore, always aware of it; and that awareness, more than the humiliation itself, seemed to be what gave the persecutions by the boys on the bus their meaning. . . . they could see the humiliation already inside me, as if I were made of glass, and if I'd been different they'd have left me alone or been friendly. (50)

Vittorio's negative childhood experience sets in motion a process which will determine his sense of self, or rather his lack thereof. The passages discussed above illustrate the two conflicting worlds that Vittorio is touched by. But, unlike Marie Barone, he discovers early on that he belongs to neither. He does not make a conscious effort to deny his roots, neither does he consciously attempt to become Canadian. His dilemma is *not* to try to reconcile the two worlds; rather it is a constant confrontation with the fact that he does not belong to anyone or anything.

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III. Language Issues: The First Generation

The novels under study show that the first generation immigrant clings to the ways of the old world, to the familiar: this includes customs and the Italian language. Consequently, s/he resists the changes and the progress of the new country. For the first-generation immigrant woman, like Assunta Barone (*Black Madonna*) and Giulia Gaetano (*The Italians*), language functions as an element of alienation. As discussed above, because language is a marker of difference, it is important for the second generation to speak English and to reject Italian. For the older generation, on the other hand, language is a constant reminder of difference whether one speaks the new language or not, for the accent or cadence of the old country always comes through. Whereas Assunta does not speak English at all, her husband Adamo speaks it with a very strong accent. When Marie comes home for Christmas she immediately notices that "his English [is] worse than she could remember" (*Black Madonna* 97). Now that she thinks she *is* English-Canadian she is even more disturbed by her father's accent which points to his otherness. Fabrizio (*Fabrizio's Passion*), too, is quick to point out that his father speaks "a broken French."

The first characteristic of a minority literature, such as Italian-Canadian literature "is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 16). Language is an element of alienation for the immigrant because it is a constant reminder of displacement and deterritorialization. Every

time Assunta hears English, she cannot understand what is said. She is therefore reminded that she is a visitor in someone else's country. Deleuze and Guattari make the point that

> . . . many people today live in a language that is not their own . . . Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve . . . This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children . . . (19)

The immigrant has two options in dealing with the language issue. The first is to learn the language of the new country and consequently open the door to a new mentality – this is the choice of the second generation, the breadwinner (usually the father), and of exceptional characters such as Maddalena in *The Father*. The second option is to refuse to learn the language and to concentrate one's activities within the Italian community, the consequence of which is to live in isolation. This is usually the option of the mother, as seen through the characters of Assunta and Giulia. The choice made determines the lifestyle that one will adhere to in the new country. Of course, the second option is aligned with wanting to hold on to the old country. More often than not, the women live the second option either by choice (Assunta) or merely by chance. Giulia Gaetano and Assunta Barone are good examples of this lifestyle. Giulia never got over the move to the new country: "She hadn't adapted. She had remained the same as when he [Adamo] had left her, Lorianna and Aldo in the Marches to go to 'America' to pave the way for their own emigration" (*The Italians* 75). Because Giulia

did not learn the language (and the ways of the new country), she lives in isolation and is totally dependent on the other members of the Gaetano family. Unlike Assunta Barone, however, Giulia is able to communicate with her children because the first two, Aldo and Lorianna, were born in Italy. They therefore still have ties to Italy which prevents them from seeing their mother as totally foreign.

Giulia Gaetano and Assunta Barone essentially live their lives in the basement, which is a reflection of their isolation: they live "underground" where there is no natural light and, consequently, they live in a state of ignorance and blindness. These living conditions inevitably result in a lack of self-confidence. Joseph Pivato writes that Giulia

> . . . is not only inarticulate in the family but invisible. She effaces herself to the point of non-existence. This is not merely a form of immigrant shyness, but of low self-esteem. Silence is a way of covering over the self-hatred the immigrant may feel. (*Echo* 205-6)

This is also true of Assunta Barone. Assunta is so totally isolated following her husband's death that she commits suicide because she has no one to fall back on. These women define their existence through their children, husband and home. Assunta's tragic death is a good example of what happens to such women when the family no longer defines their existence: self-disesteem, worthlessness, self-destruction. The lifestyle of Assunta and Giulia contrasts greatly with that of their husbands who are the link with the outside world, the culture of the new land and its language. Through the

characters of voiceless women, Assunta Barone in particular, Frank Paci emphasizes the drastic consequences of living in isolation. Assunta's voicelessness, as Paci himself says in an interview with Joseph Pivato, "is an unusual condition and readers must ask why is she this way? This woman character raises questions both about the immigrant world and about Canadian society" (Hutcheon and Richmond 233). Furthermore, using Father Sarlo as his mouthpiece, Paci suggests that an effort must be made (especially by the children) to maintain the link between the old world (as represented by the parents, especially the mother) and the Canadian reality:

> You young people . . . You should be ashamed of yourselves. You grow up in this community, in an Italian home with good parents who work to the bone for you, and what do you do? You grow away from your mother tongue. You lose your culture and your heritage. And then you become strangers with your parents. They come to this country mainly for you, so that you can have the advantages denied to them—and what do you do? The first moment you get the opportunity you turn your back to them. (*Black Madonna* 158)

As a children of immigrants himself, Paci has followed the path of rejecting his heritage only to realize its importance as part of his bicultural identity. In a sense, he writes in order to right the wrong caused by the second generation towards the first. Paci's novels are, as he puts it, an "homage to the sacrifices of the first-generation immigrant parents" (Hutcheon and Richmond 232). The fact that

Paci's novels, and the works of other writers under study, have been published, read and written about is evidence that the sacrifices of the first-generation have not been in vain.

Throughout the novel Assunta Barone is given this refrain: "I have never belonged here" (*Black Madonna* 96). Paci emphasizes this again and again in other ways besides the refrain: he points to the fact that Assunta had been a "mail-order bride" to emphasize that she does not belong to the family either. This is done specifically through Marie's ongoing "feud" with her mother. Marie constantly blames her mother for being different, for not having adapted, for not speaking English. As Marie grows up the value of her mother decreases in her eyes:

> The revelation that she was a mail-order bride was the first blow. If anything could cast doubt on her value it was certainly that. Then gradually being ashamed of Assunta's failure to adapt to the new country. Not picking up the language. Remaining so blatantly old-country with her vulgar ways. Like still keeping a chamber pot under her bed at night. Or yelling at the top of her voice when she was angry. Or chattering like a magpie when her friends came to visit. (39)

In Marie's eyes, Assunta is an intruder in her own home and in her own family because she refuses to acknowledge the existence of the Canadian social sphere, not to mention its influence on her children. Ironically, as discussed earlier, this is exactly how Marie

feels about herself: she is a stranger in her home because she wants to belong elsewhere, to be someone else.

In *The Father*, Frank Paci inverts the traditional gender roles: Oreste Mancuso is the one who refuses to accept progress by refusing to speak English and by resisting the move out of the old neighbourhood; his wife Maddalena, on the other hand, becomes a high profile businesswoman after having learnt an impeccable English and taken business courses. The difference, of course, is Maddalena's background: she comes from the city ("a proud Roman"), where she was being trained to take over her father's pharmacy. Maddalena was raised "in a cultured home, knew most of the operas of Verdi, Puccini and Rossini, could recite parts of *The Divine Comedy*, and had a solid head for business matters" (10). Giulia (*The Italians*), Assunta (*Black Madonna*) and Oreste, on the other hand, come from small villages and have no schooling. During a conversation with her son Stephen, Maddalena criticizes her husband for lacking ambition, for wanting to remain Italian, and therefore old-fashioned, instead of bettering himself by accepting the ways of the new country, including modernization:

> Your father's against any improvement. Always he wants to keep the bakery small. He has no ambition, just like all the southern Italians. They're so backward, they're impossible. He still thinks he lives in his town in the Abruzzi. You don't know how hard I've had to fight him for the little improvements we've made. He only wants to bake his own bread . . . that small mind, that *imbecile*. (84-5)

As evidenced through the character of Maddalena, the ability to speak English gives one confidence, a sense of self and independence ["Stephen noticed how confidently his mother spoke English" (64); "She speaks better English than his teachers" (45)]. Moreover, mastering the language of the majority is a step towards belonging to the new world as opposed to feeling shame when confronted with its elements. Maddalena, let us recall, is president of St. Mary's College Parents' Club, and she is asked to run for school board office (80). She subscribes to *Business Week*, takes business trips and wears slacks (the Italian woman of the 1960s and 1970s does not wear slacks, the man does), which her husband frowns upon (64). Because Maddalena has taken on what is considered to be the traditional male role, she is called the "*padrona*" (the boss). All of these accomplishments outside of the home have augmented her confidence and assertiveness, so much so that she speaks to her husband with "unbridled condescension" (65): "The more adept she became at handling the business side of the bakery, the more poise she attained with the outside world, and the more outspoken she was at home" (64-5). Maddalena turns the small bakery in the West End into a high-profit business in the East End. She commands respect and loyalty from her employees. Her husband becomes her employee, and he is subservient in their personal relationship as well. This illustrates the move from the immigrant neighbourhood to the Canadian neighbourhood: the move away from the old and towards the new. It shows that Maddalena was indeed the brains behind the old bakery, while her husband was the hands. But, more

importantly, it shows that the manual worker, the artisan in a sense, can and will easily be replaced in the new world because there is a different set of values. Oreste cares about making bread with his hands not machines, but this is not valued in the new (modern) world.

Characters like Assunta (*Black Madonna*) and Giulia (*The Italians*) who cannot speak English remain isolated. More importantly, they remain dependent on other family members, specifically the children, thus appearing stupid or handicapped. Not knowing the language *is* a handicap. Assunta, for example, cannot understand the television programs she watches although she watches television endlessly. When other family members are also watching the program, she constantly interrupts them to ask for explanations. After a while, this becomes particularly annoying to Joey and Marie who cannot follow the program:

> Every so often Assunta would ask Joey about the particulars of the plot and he would snap out his responses impatiently.
>
> "Why don't you learn English, Ma," Joey said, irritated by the constant interruptions.
>
> "*Per amor di Dio,* Joey, *abbi pazienza.*"
>
> "Oh, c'mon," he scoffed, refusing to speak Italian. (36-7)

This exchange illustrates the child taking on an air of superiority and being condescending towards his mother because she does not understand English. Assunta speaks Italian to Joey and he "refuses" to respond in Italian, as if he were punishing a child. Here, Joey takes on the role of parent, Assunta becomes the child. Moreover, it

is interesting to note that Paci does not translate Assunta's words. What does this mean? Perhaps it is done to show that her words are not important, that is to emphasize further Joey's attitude in this exchange and the non-acceptance of Italian. (This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.)

Marie complains to her father that she cannot communicate with her mother: " '. . . it's up to her to learn English. This is an English-speaking country' " (69). Her father replies that his is an "Italian-speaking house." In *The Italians* Giulia is mistress of her home and in control of the situation when Italian friends come to visit, but she lacks self-confidence and feels helpless when people do not speak Italian. Similarly, Oreste loses confidence ["There was something mushy at the centre of him . . ." (*The Father* 81)] as the influences of the outside world invade his home. Whereas his sons and wife embrace the trends of the new country, he struggles to hang on to the old ways. It is through language that Oreste's sense of inferiority is juxtaposed to Stephen's sense of superiority:

> They spoke very little to each other. Stephen sensed a growing shyness in his father's manner toward him. They spoke only English to each other. Oreste struggled with the language while Stephen enunciated his words with military precision. (81)

Oreste's struggle with language is reflective of his struggle with the Canadian society which his sons and wife have embraced. Oreste's sense of alienation reaches a climax when the old bakery is replaced by a mechanized bakery and he is unable to make bread with his

own hands. His only recourse is drinking his wine (made by his own hands) which leads to self-destruction.

Through the characters of Oreste and Assunta, Paci's *The Father* and *Black Madonna* illustrate the consequence of failing to acknowledge the language and culture of the new country: both characters become strangers in their own home. Assunta's isolation, too, leads to self-destruction: suicide. Thus, language is not merely a marker of difference, it is also an an element of isolation, and this within the family as well as in society. A person's inability to speak the language of the outside world is a personal, familial and social handicap. That this handicap affects the personal and social spheres is self-evident. However, it is also detrimental to the family as a unit for, as we have seen, it is an element of division between members of the same family. In the novels under study, language is responsible for the ensuing lack of communication between parents and children, and in *The Father* between spouses. This is due to the fact that mastering a new language goes hand in hand with a new cultural thought process, which results in a sense of superiority towards those family members (such as Oreste and Assunta) who are unable or unwilling to "fit in." This usually causes an irreparable break – a disjoining of the family. In *Black Madonna* Marie has an ongoing feud with her mother; in *The Father* Oreste is at odds with Maddalena and Stephen; in *Infertility Rites* Nina hates her mother; and in *Fabrizio's Passion* Fabrizio and Lucia struggle with their father.

By making Oreste the alienated family member in *The Father*, Frank Paci has moved away from the norm. Traditionally, the mother is the one to have the least contact with the Canadian language and culture because she stays at home to care for the family. It follows, therefore, that the mother (Assunta, Giulia, Mrs. DiFiore, Mrs. Notte) is the least proficient in the adopted language. The child, on the other hand, is the most proficient. This inevitably creates conflict between the mother and the child, the relationship which is culturally the strongest. Thus, ultimately, one can say that language produces difference even within the familial sphere. Consequently, language is responsible for destabilizing the relationship between mother and child, thereby putting into question the maternal role. Language is what rocks the foundation of the family, and the family is traditionally very important to most Italians: "The Italian family is a stronghold in a hostile land . . . Scholars have always recognized the Italian family as the fundamental institution in the country" (Barzini 198). And, ". . . in Southern Italy during the 1950s an adult individual scarcely had a sense of self that was distinct from the identity of the family" (Tuzi 11). Immigration to the new world has had some irreparable consequences on familial interdependence: "Although the parents advocated educational and professional advancement as a strategy for their children's economic achievement, social mobility often threatened the fabric of traditional family life" (Tuzi 13). Thus, the better life and more opportunities that the immigrant seeks in

coming to the new land is often at the cost of changes to the traditional family unit.

From the child's point of view it seems logical that the parent learn to speak the language of the new country. As Marie Barone says, " 'This is an English-speaking country' " (*Black Madonna* 69). Why do some immigrants refuse to learn the language of the new country? Why do Assunta Barone, Giulia Gaetano and Mr. Notte, for example, insist on speaking Italian or their dialect? Roberta Sciff-Zamaro suggests that the immigrant's resistance to change is due "to the fact that the culture brought over from the old country is too strong to be effaced by a new environment" (84). As immigrants, these characters left their homeland where everyone spoke one language, their mother tongue or the vernacular language. In the new country, they are confronted with a foreign or vehicular language, English/French. Being confronted with English/French is the first manifestation of change for the new immigrant. Fulvio Caccia, in his essay titled "The Italian Writer and Language," writes that the vehicular language (in this case English/French) "acts as a primary agent of deterritorialization" (156). It is Italian, however, which is the deterritorialized language in the new country; that is, Italian does not have an official "place" in Canada. The term deterritorialization refers to the transfer or move of a given people, its culture and language, from one territory or country to another; whereas in the homeland this people had a definite "place," in the new country it does not and therefore stands out because of its collective difference. As such deterritorialization refers to the

exterior of a person, but the culture clash experienced has undeniable effects which cause emotional and psychological chaos. Thus, deterritorialization causes an imbalance within the immigrant which also affects her/his children who experience the consequences of the parent's move. In fact, deterritorialization has a greater impact on the children because the parent has a clear image of what was left behind: s/he knows that s/he once belonged but no longer does. The children, instead, have no sense of ever having belonged and therefore live in a blur which affects their sense of self and causes an identity crisis. The children eventually begin a process of reterritorialization which involves adopting the ways, and specifically the language, of the new country. This is the reason that mastering English/French is so important to the protagonists in the novels under study: it is the first step towards gaining a sense of belonging. Consequently, language is a major component in the second generation's quest for identity. For the first generation, however, speaking Italian only is a way of avoiding the "contamination" of the new country and culture; it is a desperate attempt to remain attached to, and of strengthening, the threatened link with the old country.

By refusing to learn the new language, Assunta Barone is hanging on to her identity as the girl from the village. It is her way of avoiding any form of reterritorialization. Assunta's attempt to keep the old world and the new completely separate (as if to avoid contamination) is most evident when she receives a letter from her sister in Italy: "When Assunta received her letter from Pia it would

be an occasion of great joy, which she would never share with anyone. She'd always read the letters alone and they'd never be seen again" (*Black Madonna* 39). Assunta, just like Oreste, constantly repeats that she wants to go back to Italy: "You send me back to Italia. I want to die in Italia" (95). Both Oreste and Assunta voice their unyielding attachment to their homeland. Mr. Notte (*Fabrizio's Passion*) displays a similar attitude when he discovers that his daughter intends to marry a non-Italian:

> I refuse to live under the same roof as a man who doesn't speak the same language as I; who won't understand me when I will tell him how much my back hurts. I want to die beside my own people. (147)

Characters of the first generation strive to keep Italian the language of the home and the home a microcosm of the Italian village left behind with its language, food, customs, and religion. But, ultimately they fail to do that. And, this failure leads to their self-destruction. (Alcohol for Oreste; suicide for Assunta.) Thus, the refusal to adapt to the new country and to learn its language causes a rupture of the family and leads to an extreme form of alienation.

For the second generation – Nina, Marie, Fabrizio – learning the language of the new country is analogous to freeing themselves from everything Italian. The children of immigrants, born and/or educated in Canada, deny and repress the maternal language. They are ashamed of being different: they are ashamed of their parents, their house, the food they eat, the customs and religion, the clothes they wear (especially the mother's black clothes) and, of course, the

Italian language. As mentioned above, Marie Barone cannot bear to listen to the "sickening Italian voices" (*Black Madonna* 69). Marie's devotion to distancing herself from "Italianness" is so successful that, later on in life, one of her students cannot believe that she is Italian (138). Marie sees her career in mathematics as a way of distancing herself from her background (139): "she was off getting educated, effacing all the marks of her Italian blood" (15). As a child, however, the English language is the first available tool to distance herself from the source of shame – her Italianness. For those of Marie's generation language is a way of moving beyond the family nucleus, a way of detaching themselves from the old world. This usually occurs when they start going to school – when they really "enter" the "new world." And, it would seem that the level of education achieved is proportional to the success in effacing the Italianness. This is visible not only through Marie, but also through Stephen in *The Father*, and through Nina in *Infertility Rites*. In the latter novel, however, Melfi also presents a character who does not follow the anti-Italian trend – Mary, Nina's childhood and lifelong friend – thus suggesting that there are other ways of dealing with the Italian-Canadian identity crisis. Mary is a foil to Nina: she is a respected lawyer who is proud of her Italianness. She is a member of several associations and a candidate for public office. Her success translates into trips to the Orient and a home in a very wealthy neighbourhood. And, as mentioned earlier, instead of leaving her parents behind in the old Italian neighbourhood, she convinces

them to move nearby – a manifestation of her ability to combine both components of her Italian-Canadian identity.

Speaking the new language gives the child a sense of belonging to the new culture – to the "in" group. In Ricci's *In a Glass House*, for example, Rita (who is the epitome of otherness) is befriended by an English girl at school. Rita quickly takes on airs because, through her association with Elena Amherst, she now knows "the way it's done" in a Canadian home. In the Innocente household, Rita does not do chores because allowing her to would be "an admission that she was part of the family" (96). Such is Rita's alienation within the "home." Through her friendship with Elena, however, Rita feels accepted by the English-Canadian – the group in power. When Elena invites Rita to sleep over, the Innocentes are at a loss about this Canadian custom. Vittorio reacts to this: "I felt a familiar shame, the sense of confronting a custom we'd not been initiated into, that couldn't be evaded without making clear what sort of family we belonged to" (102). The "sort of family" refers not only to their difference as immigrants, but also to the fact that they are a dysfunctional family. Aunt Teresa's response to the Amhersts' invitation is similar to Vittorio's:

> I thought she'd object, with an immigrant's narrow view of what was acceptable, but she seemed to share my own fear of appearing not to know how things were done here, seemed uneasy about denying Rita anything when we gave her so little. (102-3)

Thus, a decision is reached out of fear of appearing different. The fact that a *Canadian* family made the invitation is enough reason to accept it. This illustrates that through language and schooling the child brings Canadian culture to the home. Consequently, the parents learn from the children. It is a way for them to be made aware of their difference and to choose to change it if they want to. We have already seen the examples of Assunta and Oreste who choose not to.

On the negative side, however, the child's sense of superiority gained from the ability to speak English and to participate in Canadian customs soon develops into contempt for the parents who do not. Marie merely tolerates her parents; she puts up with them because she cannot change them. However, because she thinks she can change Joey, she tries to "counteract the influence of their parents by attempting to rear him according to certain principles she had picked up away from home" (*Black Madonna* 69). The "gap" between the parents (the ignorant, the ones from the old country) and the child (the knower, the one who will become Canadian) is especially painful within the framework of the Italian family given that one of the basic codes is respect for the parents: it is assumed that they usually know what's best for their children.

The family meal is the place where both worlds, Italian and Canadian, meet and both languages are used. In *Black Madonna,* Marie and Joey speak English to each other and to their father, Adamo. Adamo speaks English to his children, but an Italian dialect to his wife, Assunta. And, Adamo translates for his wife. Marie

speaks to her father only because he is the English speaking parent. There is total disregard, if not disrespect, for the parent who does not speak English. In *Fabrizio's Passion,* Mr. Notte speaks dialect to his son Fabrizio, who responds in French. However, Fabrizio speaks Italian to his mother. Because they are unable to communicate on an equal footing in any one language, the mother and daughter in *Black Madonna* do not share the usual mother/daughter "events" associated with becoming a woman. When it is time for Marie to wear a bra, for instance, she finds one in her drawer, but nothing is said to her. Marie's conflict with her mother is not only due to the inability to communicate, it is more a refusal to do so. From this lack of communication and understanding stems a desire to distance herself from everything that Assunta represents. Joseph Pivato writes that Marie's hostility towards her mother is a manifestation of her own self-hatred (*Echo* 216). More specifically, it demonstrates hatred of the Italian component of her *self,* what Robert Harney calls *atimia* or "ethnic self-disesteem" (Harney and Scarpaci 4).

In the relationship between Italian-Canadian parents and their children, language adds pressure and conflict to the already existing generation gap. Early on, they can communicate in Italian or dialect. The conflict arises, however, when the child goes to school, learns English, but stays at the same level with Italian. Communication in the Barone household, as in the Mancuso and the Notte homes, becomes difficult because the children cannot translate sophisticated English thoughts into Italian. The children speak an Italian "baby talk." Marie, for instance, lacks the vocabulary

and the sentence structure to explain to her mother her reasons for moving to Toronto. Communication is difficult because any conversation is interrupted with "how do you say this in Italian." Marie is obviously frustrated by this situation:

> It was virtually impossible to speak to her mother these days. Marie had found that her Italian had deteriorated to the point where she got stuck fairly often. It was so frustrating at times that she had to avoid saying anything but the most habitual phrases. If she used English equivalents Assunta would get annoyed and refuse to understand. Marie found herself speaking like a child, regressing ever more into the only infantile expressions that came to mind. (*Black Madonna* 68)

Thus, as *Black Madonna* shows, as the children move from adolescence to adulthood, the will to communicate with the parents weakens more and more and the gap between generations widens. Furthermore, the inability to speak the same language becomes a very convenient excuse for not having to speak to the parents at all. The assumption is made that if they cannot understand each other's language, they cannot understand their feelings either. Herein lies the inevitable jump to "tolerating" the parents' "ignorance." The children eventually move away or become involved in activities which keep them outside the parents' home. This is the case with Joey Barone whose lifestyle is such that he need only cross Assunta at home now and then – a situation which is partly responsible for Assunta's tragic end. Joey neglects his mother by spending most of his time away from home. Moreover, it is because of his limited

Italian that Joey does not make the effort to warn her to stay away from the tracks, which results in her death.

This unwillingness to communicate, this feeling of "it's not worth it anyway," seems to be a trait of Paci's characters. As with Ricci's Vittorio Innocente, Paci's characters – Marie and Joey Barone, and Stephen Mancuso – tend to leave things unsaid. They choose to remain silent rather than to take the trouble of expressing their emotions and innermost thoughts. This character flaw, I believe, stems from the language conflict that they grew up with. It has become a part of their identity and invades social and emotional relationships. Straddling across two or more cultures and languages causes problems of self-expression and, thus, of identity. Fabrizio emphasizes this in *Fabrizio's Passion:*

> Lucia and I are forced to work in three languages, even though we do not master any in a truly serious way. . . . and we could not avoid our slipping into what I call second-degree illiteracy . . . Second-degree illiteracy is a process of unlearning. A *dyslearning* — a state similar to dyslexia . . . So, please, excuse the immigrants and the children of immigrants, either born in the Old World or in the New World, who do not possess the necessary tools for dignified self-expression. (141-2)

According to Fabrizio, this "straddle effect" partially explains why children of immigrants "fabricate alternate ways of developing [their] personality" (143).

* * * * *

"Doubleness," as Linda Hutcheon writes, "is the essence of the immigrant experience" (9). The novels discussed in this chapter clearly emphasize the doubleness or the duality of the Italian-Canadian experience and the different ways of dealing with it. Whereas the older generation is, for the most part, firmly rooted to the ways and the language of the old country, their children reject the old ways in favour of the new. As Pasquale Verdicchio points out, the anti-Italianness represented in the novels discussed has its roots in socio-historical reality: "Upon arriving on the shores of these 'new' nations, many men and women soon found it necessary to render their culture less visible to the world outside their homes" ("Subalterns Abroad" 206). The duality experienced by the Italian-Canadian causes conflict within the familial sphere and an identity crisis within the individual.

The confusion inherent in the question of identity in Italian-Canadian literature has been called "existential schizophrenia" by writers such as Frank Paci and Filippo Salvatore. Although this label may seem a bit extreme, it does point to the division and multiplicity of the Italian-Canadian experience: tugged at by one world/culture and held back by another. Through their fiction Italian-Canadian writers indicate that this "existential schizophrenia" can only be cured by making the "journey home." In some cases, this refers to the journey to the old country as a form of reconciliation with one's roots. This is, in fact, what Marie Barone undertakes at the end of *Black Madonna*. More importantly, however, the "journey home" involves a reevaluation of one's

duality and a reconciliation with one's origins. The main message in the novels discussed above is clear:

> . . . only by coming to terms with its own origins and accepting them, will the new Italian-Canadian generation . . . be able to find an identity which will allow it to feel that it really belongs in the country [Canada] of its birth. An identity which, however, will be characterized by a full consciousness of its own roots and its own cultural background. The duality of Italian and Canadian will thus be overcome, giving life to a new identity . . . in which both components are present not in tension but in symbiosis. (Sciff-Zamaro 87)

The process which leads to self-definition usually begins with an attempt to deny one's origins: Nina, Marie, Stephen and Vittorio turn their backs on "everything Italian" in an attempt to become Canadian, thus believing that this will lead to self-definition. By the end of the narrative, however, these characters realize that it is by reconnecting with their Italian heritage that they will find "home." Although the characters discussed above may not have found "home," or even undertaken the "journey home," by the end of the narrative, they do reach an awareness that such a journey is essential in defining their own identity. At the end of *Black Madonna* Marie Barone decides to visit her mother's village because she understands that this journey is essential to her self-definition. In the closing scene of *The Father*, Stephen Mancuso makes bread with his own hands, thus attesting to the importance of his father's values, values deeply rooted in the old country. Nina DiFiore (*Infertility Rites*)

comes to the realization that a child is not the solution to her identity crisis, but that she must focus on her identity before she has a child. And, Lorianna Gaetano (*The Italians*), the middle child who is caught between the influence of the old world and the new, realizes that she is neither completely Canadian nor completely Italian.

For the first generation, the duality of Italian and Canadian is clearly external: they are Italians in a new country, Canada. For the second generation, however, this duality is more complicated because the Italian and the Canadian cannot be isolated: they are neither only Italian nor only Canadian, but both.

Chapter Three: The Process of Narration

Narratology is "the set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematics of narrating (telling a story) and on the structure of plot" (Makaryk 110). Whereas the previous chapter discussed identity and "the narrated" (the events told), this chapter discusses "the narrating" (the telling), and the next will concentrate on "the narrator" (the teller). The following discussion makes the link between the narrative structure and the question of identity as represented in the following novels: Frank Paci's *The Italians*, *Black Madonna* and *The Father*, Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* and Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion*. Rather than undertaking a rigorous narratological analysis, however, the elements of narratology are used towards rethinking questions of identity and agency inherent in the Italian-Canadian novels mentioned above. In its own way, each novel shows that the act of narrating is in itself a step in the process towards defining an identity. In some cases, the protagonist's search for self is resolved by telling her/his story.

The story consists of "a series of narrative motifs in their chronological sequence, moving from individual cause to effect; whereas the plot represents the same motifs, but in the specific order of occurrence to which they are assigned in the text" (Makaryk 632). The narratological analysis of the literary texts under study reveals a constant shifting between the old and the new, the past and the present, in an attempt to establish some order leading towards a sense of identity. In *The Italians*, for instance, the four levels of narration are shared by the father, who represents the old country; Bill the Canadian-born son who represents the new country; and

Lorianna and Aldo, Italian-born but Canadian-raised who represent the doubleness of the two countries/cultures. The process of narration in this novel reflects the family's struggle between the old and the new and the attempt to negotiate a middle ground. A key issue in this novel is the question of whose perspective is used to narrate the events.

In the novels discussed here, the levels of narration and the pattern established by the process of narration function to illustrate the duality and confusion inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. In reading *Fabrizio's Passion*, for instance, specific questions such as the following arise: Why does the narration of one event follow another and what is the effect on the narrative as a whole of this chosen sequence? Why is this flashback appropriate here and not later or earlier in the narrative? One realizes that the specific (dis)order of the process of narration is purposely done to illustrate the "disorder" of Fabrizio's self. Thus, the process of the telling – the sequence used in telling the events as well as from whose perspective they are told – plays an important role in the question of identity as represented in the novels under study. An analysis of the elements of narratology shows that the duality of the Italian-Canadian identity exposed at the level of the narrated is also reflected in the narration.

* * * * *

In *Narrative Fiction*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan makes the distinction between narration *of* the story and narration *in* the story. In her explanation of the latter she writes,

> A character whose actions are the object of narration can himself in turn engage in narrating a story. Within his story there may, of course, be yet another character who narrates another story, and so on in infinite regress. Such narratives within narratives create a stratification of levels whereby each inner narrative is subordinate to the narrative within which it is embedded. (91)

The stratification of levels created by narration *in* the story which Rimmon-Kenan refers to is present in a text such as Caterina Edwards *The Lion's Mouth:* Bianca narrates the story of Marco, and within Marco's narrative Lea narrates the story of Bevilacqua. Similarly, in *Fabrizio's Passion* the story of Antigone is embedded in Fabrizio's narrative, represented through his filmscript. A detailed analysis of these two novels will follow later on in this chapter. In this section of the chapter, the discussion concentrates on the levels created by the telling of the story – what is referred to as the process of narration.

Several of the novels under study are composed of multiple narratives without necessarily adhering to the simplified concentric model of a narrative within a narrative illustrated above by Rimmon-Kenan. *The Italians*, for example, harbours four narratives – and four distinct processes of narration – which move alongside one other. *Black Madonna* and *The Father* are similar in that they

harbour two levels of narration – the past and the present – but different because *The Father* follows Rimmon-Kenan's concentric model whereas *Black Madonna* does not.

Although it may not be readily visible, a detailed analysis will show that the levels of narration in each of the novels treated in this section adhere to a hierarchical structure. I will use the terms "main narration" and subordinate or "secondary narration," which are also used by Gerald Prince in *Narratology*:

> When there are several narrations in a narrative, one of them may introduce another one which in turn introduces another one, and so on; or one of them may introduce several others in succession, and so forth. In every case, the one which ultimately introduces all of the others constitutes the main narration; the others are secondary narrations, or tertiary ones, etc. (35)

* * * * *

I. *The Italians*: The Family versus the Individual

Whereas previously the quest for identity was discussed as an inherent component of the narrative or the story, the novels analyzed in this section show that the levels of narration, main and secondary, and the relationship between them, function to illustrate that same quest for identity which is inherent in the narratives.

So far in this thesis, identity has been discussed as the quest of

the individual. Frank Paci's *The Italians,* however, is a good example of how the levels of narration and the process of narration are used to demonstrate the family quest for identity. The novel concentrates on the struggle that the Gaetano family undergoes in order to define its identity in the new land. Paci uses the process of narration to specify that it is the Gaetano family's quest for identity and not the quest of a family member in particular that the novel concentrates on. The individual chapters, certainly, deal with specific characters' quest, but the novel as a whole is structured in a way that emphasizes the family's quest.

The process of narration used in *The Italians* gives voice to four of the five members of the Gaetano family: Lorianna, Alberto, Aldo and Bill. The exclusion of Giulia, the mother, immediately stands out. Her voicelessness as a character in the narrative and as a member of the Gaetano family is reflected in the process of narration through the exclusion itself. Given that Giulia is depicted as a secluded character who does not speak English and who does not strive to find a role for herself (outside the family) in the new land, it only follows that her narrative perspective not be included. The identity of the family, then, includes a silent mother, or one who rarely speaks, who cannot communicate using the language of the adopted country, and who takes a back seat to other family members. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Giulia's story is related in the chapters told from her husband's perspective (78) rather than the children's. As was discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Alberto is in fact his wife's mouthpiece. This is in line with the reality of the

dynamics of the traditional Italian family of the period: the husband speaks for his wife because she does not speak the language of the adopted country and because he has the dominant role in the relationship. As Joseph Pivato writes, Giulia "is not only inarticulate in the family but invisible. She effaces herself to the point of non-existence" (*Echo* 205). Thus, the fact that the mother does not have a quest for identity in the adopted country is reflected at the level of the narrative, as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as on the level of narration. The process of narration, therefore, is reflective of the identity of the Gaetano family.

Paci's *The Italians* is divided into twenty-six chapters, each of which is titled after the character whose perspective the chapter is told from; that is, Lorianna, Alberto, Aldo and Bill. This results in four different perspectives in the process of narration, four individual quests. Lorianna's quest is that of finding her identity amidst the duality of the Italian and the Canadian. Born in Italy, she feels a responsibility towards the old country, the older generation and her religious upbringing. Aldo, also born in the old country, is torn between his desires and the pressures of becoming a priest, for which his parents have made numerous sacrifices. Bill, who is the only Canadian-born family member, seeks assimilation through a career in hockey, *the* Canadian sport. Alberto represents the ambiguity experienced by the first generation immigrant who strives to keep his family together while learning the ways of the new country.

The process of narration used for each of the four narratives

inhabits the same level of narration. In other words, all four are secondary narrations which break one another with the beginning of each new chapter. It is the intertwining of the four individual narratives/narrations which creates the main narrative/narration, that of the Gaetano family. This becomes apparent when the four narrations intersect in the nineteenth chapter. The diagram below illustrates the structure of the main narrative.

Lorianna	Alberto	Aldo	Bill
1	2	3	4
5		6	7
8	9		10, 11
		12	
13			14
	15, 16		
17		18, 19, 20	
	21		
22			23
24			25
26			

The numbers above correspond to the sequence of the chapters, and the headings correspond to the character from whose perspective the chapter is narrated. Two things immediately stand out in this visual rendition of the narrative's structure: the concentration of specific

chapters for some characters; and the absence of chapters for two characters (Alberto and Aldo) towards the end of the novel.

The first chapter is told from Lorianna's perspective, the second from Alberto's, the third from Aldo's, the fourth from Bill's – all using the third-person narrator. Although this sequence does not set a pattern, it raises some important points with respect to the process of narration and the quest for identity, individual and familial. First, it is interesting to note that chapters on the three men are consecutive at specific points in the novel: chapters 10 and 11 for Bill, 15 and 16 for Alberto, and 18, 19, 20 for Aldo. The reader is therefore forced to focus on the individual's quest during the segment of consecutive chapters, which produces something of a digression. In spite of the fact that the "intersection" of the processes of narration occurs in a chapter narrated from Aldo's perspective, I would suggest that Lorianna is the family representative. As the diagram above clearly shows, Lorianna's column is the longest, most regular and most consistent. The fact that Lorianna does not have consecutive chapters is a further indication that she represents the family quest (above her own). (This says something about the woman's position within the Italian family.) In fact, it is significant that the first four chapters which set the action in motion and which introduce the four major characters are presented in this specific order: the structure of the narrative and the process of narration give precedence to the only other woman in the Gaetano family, Lorianna. Not only is Lorianna's perspective and her story given first, but eight of the twenty-six chapters are dedicated to her story:

1, 5, 8, 13, 17, 22, 24, 26. This is more than the space alotted to the three men: Bill – seven, Aldo – six, and Alberto – five. The novel not only begins and ends with chapters on Lorianna, but towards the end of the novel the frequency increases, constituting every second chapter. Thus, the process of narration emphasizes the two women in the Gaetano family: Giulia by exclusion, thereby reflecting her voicelessness, and Lorianna by her above-average presence, thereby suggesting that she speak for the family.

Due to the chapter sequence, the process of narration clearly influences the reader's rapport with the narrative and with the character from whose perspective it is told. Hence, from chapter to chapter the reader must redefine her/his relationship with a given character. The effect is one of constant shift and movement, between a sense of closeness and a sense of distance. When in a given chapter the reader becomes familiar with the thoughts of the character from whose perspective the story is narrated, that bond between reader and character is broken when a new chapter begins, and the reader must make an adjustment and refamiliarize with the thoughts and preoccupations of another character. For example, the reader gets close to Lorianna in the fifth chapter, only to be interrupted by Aldo in the sixth, thereby becoming familiar with him, yet being interrupted once again in the seventh chapter by Bill. Moreover, the initial bond between the reader and a specific character is complicated further when that character appears in the narrative of another. This is particularly true of the action set at the hospital, which brings together all of the major characters. Thus, when Lorianna, who is

present, is referred to as "his sister" (146), the shift in allegiance between character and reader is highlighted. The reader must consequently adjust to the fact that Lorianna is kept at a distance in this chapter.

In the instances, however, in which the text presents consecutive chapters on the same character (Bill 10-11; Alberto 15-16; Aldo 18, 19, 20), the effect is an even greater closeness between reader and (male) character. In spite of this, and not withstanding the fact that there are no consecutive chapters on Lorianna, the relationship between the reader and Lorianna is maintained. In other words, it is not because the narration periodically concentrates on each of the male characters that Lorianna's importance in the process of narration is diminished. In fact, I would argue to the contrary given that consecutive chapters focus on the quest of the individual, but function as a digression in the novel as a whole. Due to the space that she inhabits in the process of narration, Lorianna stands for the concept of the family. (This will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.)

The process of narration leads progressively to a new identity for the individual and for the family in the new world: it is a reevaluation of their responsibilities towards each other and a defining of who they are as a family vis-à-vis the environment in which they live, a blending of the old and the new world. The identity of the family is located where the old meets the new: in other words, where/when the children realize the importance of what came before them – their parents, their roots. This occurs

where the four narratives intersect, in the nineteenth chapter. The following is a passage narrated from Aldo's perspective, the setting of which is the hospital where Aldo, Lorianna and Bill await news of their father's condition following the accident at the plant.

> And for the first time they smiled together, as if they quite unexpectedly and jointly had discovered how close they had actually been to each other from the very beginning. He [Aldo] could feel the warmth within him suddenly reach out and join with theirs [Bill's and Lorianna's] in a firm bond. They had, without fanfare and without much preparation, he felt, established their ascendency and their kinship.
>
> It was as if their father had continued to give them sustenance even when they had turned their backs on him, as if he had held them together with his persistence and his rigorous unquestioning belief in them. They had become better educated than he, they had grown to accept a different culture than his, and still he had persevered in their behalf. (154-155)

The reunion exemplified in this passage evokes a reassessment or a taking control of the family's "self." It is in this setting that a renewal in family identity takes place, an almost surreal sense of something being passed on from one generation to the next (154). This is a crucial scene and a crucial chapter in the novel because it is the point where individual goals and quests are put aside to concentrate on the family's. Each in turn, the children reevaluate their attitude and behaviour towards their father. Aldo says, "I think each of us in his

own way has failed him. We've taken too much for granted. It's as if his entirely different world has been closed to us" (154). And Lorianna admits, "I had the feeling . . . that he wanted something from us, something that we failed to give him in all our time of living in the same house with him" (146).

The accident itself is recounted from Alberto's perspective only after the reader has witnessed the children's reaction to it. The accident is first announced on page 140 in the form of a telegram received by Aldo: "BABO SERIOUSLY INJURED IN ACCIDENT COME HOME URGENT." This is followed by two chapters (19 and 20) narrated from Aldo's perspective which recount the anxiety experienced at the hospital while waiting to see if their father will survive. It is only after this, in the twenty-first chapter, that the events leading up to the accident are narrated from Alberto's perspective. Because the reader is given details of the accident after having read its consequences it can be labelled a flashback in the novel's line of narration as a whole, but not in the process of narration associated with Alberto. The intricacy of this sequence in the process of narration is a result of the fact that four narrations run alongside one another, and thereby constitute the main narrative. It is the result of this interplay of chapters, specifically with regard to Alberto's accident, which suggests the importance of the family identity over that of the individual. This is verified by the fact that although the flow/sequence of the individual chapters is broken, the main narrative remains intact. Furthermore, when the plot moves beyond the accident, the chapters narrated from Aldo's and Alberto's

perspective stop. This is appropriate because it is at this crossroad that Aldo commits himself to another "family" – the church – thereby renouncing his voice in the Gaetano family quest. Aldo's "spiritual" position is visible in his fatherly attitude towards his siblings: "He [Aldo] surveyed them [Bill and Lorianna] with pride. They had shown an unexpected expression of togetherness in the crisis and it had been like finding a treasure" (153). Meanwhile, Alberto gives up his voice to the second generation, to the children who will take care of him: Lorianna and Bill. The fact that the last five chapters are narrated from their perspective (Lorianna's and Bill's, see diagram above) demonstrates the importance of their role in maintaining the family identity. It is important to note that Lorianna as the Italian (the child who has an affinity to the old country and who is closest to the family) comes together with Bill (the child who wants to break away from the family) who represents Canadianness. Thus, the alternating of chapters narrated from the perspective of Lorianna and Bill towards the end of the novel points to the Italian-Canadian duality and, more importantly, to the negotiation necessary in defining a bicultural identity.

Alberto's accident, and consequently the children's reunion, is important thematically because it is the climax which dictates the importance of the family over the individual. It is here that Aldo vows to return to the seminary to become a priest; it is here that Bill ends his affair with Robin and returns to his wife; and it is here that Lorianna realizes the importance of her role in the family. On the level of narration, the accident has a major function because it

signals the convergence of the secondary narrations which define and give precedence to the main narration, that of the Gaetano family.

In *The Italians*, the process of narration reflects the duality experienced by the Italian-Canadian. By giving the perspective of the father and the children, Paci gives voice to the two generations which reflect the old country and the adopted land. This allows the reader to experience as closely as possible the dualities and conflicts of each generation. Whereas the children (Lorianna and Aldo) born in the old country feel a certain responsibility towards the country of origin, Canadian-born Bill considers himself Canadian only, as illustrated through his personal quest to become a hockey star: "From being a second-generation Italian he had now become 'the hockey star'. . ." (150). But as Aldo asks, "What had they given up for their new roles?" (150). Paci's combination of voices and perspectives on the level of narration – spanning two generations, two countries and three mentalities – is unprecedented. By reflecting the content of the narrative in the process of narration, Paci points to the importance of the old in order to maintain the new.

Frank Paci has been called a feminist writer because he takes on the cause of his female characters. This is visible through the space and the foreground given to Lorianna's perspective in the process of narration. Lorianna represents the Italian-Canadian woman of the second generation. She bridges two families, and the process of narration shows the importance of her role in the quest for identity on both levels: as a Gaetano and as a wife and mother. On

the first level, she progresses into the daughter who takes control when her father is incapacitated: she is the one who makes the decision to move into her parents' home (154) in order to help them deal with the near-tragedy. On the second level, Lorianna grows from a humiliated and abused newlywed to a confident mother and wife. Her relationship with Lorenzo gradually shifts from one of master/servant to one in which her input is valued and respected. Paci shows this progression through the process of narration, and particularly through scenes of intimacy, which the author carefully places in the first and last chapters. The contrast is poignant: in the first chapter Lorianna is raped by her husband; in the last chapter they share a fulfilling and enjoyable sexual experience. The contrast is noticeable in the tone and diction of the two passages. In the first chapter:

> . . . he slapped her with the palm and back of his hand, two hard resounding slaps that put all the life out of her. Then he flung her onto the bed. She bounced up and down like a piece of dead weight. . . . Then Lorenzo came down on her as she lay there silently praying. (17)

At this point there is a break in the narrative: the sexual act itself is not narrated but left to the reader's imagination. The last chapter, however, is more detailed:

> For now whenever he touched her he made her feel as if she were the most important person in the world. There seemed to be reverence in his caresses. . . . Then she placed her hands at the small of his back and guided him gently, ever so gently,

> to her movements, to her rhythm, so that once they were in unison she had the feeling that they could never part. (200-1)

The juxtaposition of these two scenes illustrates the growth attained by the end of the narrative: Lorianna and Lorenzo have found themselves as a couple and as a family. Lorianna's growth is evident in the shift from being passive and helpless to active and fulfilled, and at the grammatical level she shifts from being the object to the subject. At the end of the second passage, Paci purposely uses dialogue which alludes to the sexual experience in the first chapter: Lorenzo says, " 'We're really married now, aren't we, Lori?' " (201). This line carries more weight given that Lorenzo is the speaker because it shows that he has grown as well.

The fact that the identity of Lorianna's immediate family has been defined does not diminish her role in the identity of her original family:

> . . . she could never really leave her parents' household. She was drawn to it by a force stronger than one of affection or reason. She was drawn to that little world her parents had created within the walls of the house as water is drawn to its most natural level. After her first difficulties with Lorenzo she hadn't recognized it and had stayed away, thinking that she had been duped by that little enclosed world. But now she realized, looking at her mother's lined and ravaged face, that she was *neither Canadian nor Italian*, but simply a member of the family which was part of something larger that she had *no right to either describe or label*. (my italics, 133)

The original family represents the old world, Italianness. The immediate family represents the new country and its openness, as indicated by the channel of communication established between the couple, Lorianna and Lorenzo. Lorianna realizes that she is neither Canadian nor Italian but a combination of both. The growth and maturity demonstrated in this passage reveals her acknowledgement and acceptance of her role as the spokesperson for the familial quest, as testified by her function in the process of narration. Whereas in *Black Madonna* Marie Barone has only one objective – to detach herself from her family, her upbringing and her immigrant roots, Lorianna wants to hold on to her Italian heritage. This is shown in her decision to marry an Italian from the old country and in her fervent religious values. Lorianna feels a certain responsibility towards the old country. In fact, she blames the difficulties in her marriage, early on, and her father's accident on her "unfaithfulness" towards the old country: " 'We had responsibilities to him, Aldo; we were born in the old country. We had a deeper obligation to understand him' " (145). Lorianna finds her own identity as a consequence of the family's quest for identity. The path followed by Lorianna shows the importance that Paci gives to the woman in the identity of the Italian family: her voice was silenced in the first generation immigrant, as represented by Giulia, but with the second generation she has a more visible role and a more audible voice. Lorianna's situation is such that she straddles both cultures: she is given a voice to indicate the woman's changing position in the new world, while still maintaining the responsibility of family interests

above her own personal ones. The constant shifting which occurs in the process of narration illustrates the shifting (occurring within the) Italian-Canadian identity.

* * * * *

II. Flashback as a Level of Narration: The Return Journey

This section analyzes the narrative technique of flashback which is presented as a distinct level of narration in two novels: *The Father* and *Black Madonna.* Although the general purpose of the flashback is to illustrate events of the past in order to clarify the present, for the main characters as well as for the reader, each novel presents this nonlinear narration in a unique way. In *Black Madonna,* the flashback narration comprises a separate narrative which breaks the main narration as if it were a foreign component. It does, nonetheless, claim its space in the main narrative (but not in the main narration). In *The Father* the flashback narration, which embodies the return journey necessary in Stephen Mancuso's quest for identity, is an integral component of the main narration and the main narrative.

The concept of the "return journey" in Western fiction goes as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*. In Italian-Canadian literary criticism, Joseph Pivato's well known essay "The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature" is a valuable asset. Pivato argues that the return journey is not simply a major theme but "an obsession in the

Italian-Canadian imagination" (170). In fiction which transcends the duality of two countries/cultures – what has been referred to as immigrant literature – the return journey shows a need to look to the past, towards one's roots, in an attempt to understand better the present, and the self. Several reasons can be found to demonstrate the importance of this need to return to the country of origin. The first is to reaffirm the link or to strengthen the ties with the old country. The second, which is particularly true of the first-generation immigrant, is to show that wealth and success have been acquired in the new land and that, therefore, emigration was not in vain. This attitude is demonstrated in Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man* as well as Frank Paci's *The Italians*: "If he [Alberto] were to go back, he said to himself, it would be as a victorious Canadian. He had to show them that his commitment to the new country was irrevocable" (*The Italians* 129). The third reason, which affects the children of immigrants in particular, is more oriented towards the inner self: it is an essential step in the quest for identity. This is illustrated in C. Dino Minni's short stories "Roots" and "Eldorado," for example, where the main characters need to visit the hometown of their ancestors in order to find the "real self."

Among the novels discussed here, *Black Madonna* presents the return journey at the end of the novel: Marie Barone leaves for Italy because she wants to know who her mother was and where she originates from. *Black Madonna* presents a literal manifestation of the return journey: a person's physical displacement from the adopted country to the country of origin. But the return journey

need not imply or involve physical displacement. A metaphorical journey "home" is possible and plausible to fulfill the same function in the quest for identity. For example, Vittorio Innocente's journey to Africa (*In a Glass House*) is a pseudo return journey for, although he does not return to the land of his ancestors, his stay in Africa recalls images of Italy:

> . . . the country seeped into me, grew familiar as if I'd remembered it from my own past. There was a way people were there that brought up in me the sense that they were my secret, truer allies who I'd defected from to the whites: with students sometimes a gesture or tone of voice, the contour of a face, would bring back suddenly some classmate from Valle del Sole, the ramshackle classroom there, its uneven walls and stone floor; in the lorry parks the market women, mocking and independent and fierce, seemed to hold in them a familiar fire. And I was happy there finally, unreasonably so, felt a contentment at the core of me that seemed to have little to do with the daily texture of my life . . . (307)

Vittorio's journey can be labelled a pseudo return journey because the dislocation from Canada to Africa incites images of his past which give him the sense of internal peace associated with the search for self. In *The Lion's Mouth*, on the other hand, Bianca experiences the return journey through the creative act of writing a novel about her cousin Marco. As Pivato writes, "The novel is an imaginative return trip to Bianca's Venice. In this way this Canadian heroine can learn about Venice, about Marco, and most of all about herself" ("The

Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature" 174). Thus, the return journey can be literal as in *Black Madonna*, it can be part of the imagination as in *The Lion's Mouth*, or it can be symbolic as in a journey through memory. The symbolic return journey consists of a geographical or temporal displacement from the present reality which occurs through the mind.

The return journey, whether literal or symbolic, is a major stepping stone in the quest for identity. In several of the novels under study in this thesis, flashback is used to present events in the past which clarify the present for the reader and for the character in search of self. Nina DiFiore in *Infertility Rites*, for example, recalls childhood events which still haunt her present. It is Paci's *The Father*, however, which best exemplifies the use of flashback as a narrative technique to present the return journey in Stephen Mancuso's quest for identity. In *The Father*, the major part of the narrative is a flashback; of the twenty-three chapters, only five occur in the present: the first two and the last three. Therefore, the core of the narrative – eighteen chapters – is a continuous flashback. Given that time, the passing of time, and specific moments in time are of great importance in *The Father*, it is therefore significant that the chapters be titled using dates. The narrative begins in December 1979 (first and second chapter), then flashes back to June 1953 (third chapter). The flashback continues chronologically until May 1975 (twentieth chapter), then returns to the present (December 1979).

The Father is essentially about the past, and more specifically, how the events in the past have contributed to shaping one person –

Stephen Mancuso. Stephen's return journey to his roots causes him to reevaluate his past and his present, but mostly to reappreciate what he learned from his father (hence, the title of the novel): to make his own bread. The return journey through childhood and adolescence is necessary in order for Stephen to find himself. He had rejected his father and what he stood for: the old country, the old ways, the old fashioned as opposed to the modern in the new country as represented by his mother. Symbolically speaking, therefore, since the father represents the old country, the flashback is a return journey towards Stephen's roots. This journey to the past is Stephen's way of communicating with his father, one which leads to self-knowledge. It is as a result of his "return journey" that Stephen understands who he is and how he wants to live his life.

By the second to last chapter the flashback narration has come full circle with the present. Paci uses the dream as a marker to shift from the past of the flashback, which ended in the previous chapter, to the present. Stephen awakens from the dream to find himself in his mother's bedroom:

> When Stephen woke up he didn't know where he was. He was momentarily overcome by a sickening fear that he was back in his room in the graduate residence. But there were no books along the walls. Instead, the light streaming through the window showed the various photographs in his mother's bedroom. He breathed easier. (173)

The photographs of his family constitute the marker which signalled and closed the dream/flashback. In the main narration which

follows the flashback, Stephen takes a physical journey towards the past by visiting people who knew his father: Father Riley and Amelio DiLabio, who worked in the old bakery. Then he walks towards the West End, where he grew up, and the setting of the flashback narration. Finally, in the last chapter he bakes bread with his own hands, using the ingredients and the technique that he learned from his father.

Whereas the eighteen chapters which make up the flashback narration constitute a symbolic return journey, the last three chapters represent Stephen's journey in the present to find himself through his father in order to ask for forgiveness. This physical journey is an acknowledgement of the truth, which is necessary for Stephen to feel complete. The journey towards the truth is signalled by a reference to *La Bocca della Verità* (The Mouth of Truth) before and immediately after the flashback. *La Bocca della Verità* is "a mask-like bas relief" which deciphers truth: "anyone putting his hand in The Mouth of Truth and swearing falsely could not withdraw it" (9). At the end of the flashback, Stephen sticks his finger into The Mouth on impulse (174), thus attesting to his newfound truth, his "self." Stephen's former girlfriend Anna who, besides God and Stephen's father, is one of the three great influences of his life, had accused Stephen of being "an incomplete person" (171). Stephen has finally acknowledged that the only way to find himself is to follow his father's motto: "bake your own bread." Stephen's return journey is provoked by a need to find the truth about himself which leads to a feeling of completeness:

> Somehow, along the way, he had taken a wrong fork in the road, he thought. He had to turn around and find the right road. He had no intention of just being an academic, baking someone else's bread. He had to bake his own bread like Oreste Mancuso. (17)

The intent described in this passage, "to turn around and find the right road," indicates Stephen's need to find out who he is, to find out the truth about himself, the need to make things right. This turning around, which is the signal for his quest for identity, is reflected in the process of narration when the narration breaks from the present and the flashback begins.

* * * * *

Black Madonna presents two narratives and two levels of narration which interrupt one another without warning: the shift simply occurs with the start of a new chapter, thus maintaining the level of surprise and the reader's alertness. Of the thirteen chapters which make up *Black Madonna*, nine constitute the main narration of the present and four are part of a continuous flashback. As the diagram below illustrates, the main narration is broken by the flashback narration in four specific instances: chapters 2, 5, 7 and 9. The four chapters of the flashback narration appear in chronological order, just as the chapters of the main narration do, but because they interrupt the main narration, they also break the chronology or linearity of the novel as a whole.

Main Narration	Flashback Narration
1	
	2
3	
4	
	5
6	
	7
8	
	9
10	
11	
12	
13	

Paci uses a third person narrator throughout the novel, but the narratorial perspective shifts from one level of narration to the other: from Joey's in the main narration to Marie's in the flashback narration. Although *Black Madonna* presents two independent narratives, the flashback which concentrates on Marie Barone serves to clarify the main narrative which concentrates on the Barone family.

In *Black Madonna* the traditional quest for identity, defined as a journey towards finding the self, does not begin until the end of the novel. The crux of the novel – the main narration – concentrates on

the disidentity, or the process of disintegration, which occurs on the familial and individual levels: the death of the patriarch, who is the link between the two generations; the mother's breakdown, to which the children respond with neglect due to their inability to understand her grief, and which results in the mother's suicide; Joey's lack of self-worth; and Marie's unstable marriage. It is only as a result of this negative process that the children see the need to reevaluate their situation and find out who they are. The process of disidentity is triggered by Adamo Barone's death for, prior to this, he maintains the equilibrium and the communication between the old country and the new, or between the two generations as represented by Assunta Barone on the one hand and her children, Joey and Marie, on the other. Whereas in the flashback narrative the reader is *shown* that Adamo Barone acts as mediator between the children and the mother, in the main narrative the reader is *told* the same:

> Like a buffer, his father was able to cushion them from their mother's old-fashioned ways, her intractableness, her hard bitterness at having come to the new country, and her sense of doom about everything. She was highly strung, demonstrative and stubborn. He was calm, reticent and flexible. Now that Adamo was gone Joey could feel just how wide the gulf between them actually was. (133)

Thus, with the death of Adamo Barone the family disintegrates further since, without a mediator, there is no communication between Assunta and her children.

The main narration also illustrates Joey's nonquest for

identity. The term "nonquest" refers to a passive state adopted by a character who does not have a clear idea of his own identity, but who does not aim to do something about it even though s/he is dissatisfied with her/his condition. Thus, "nonquest" can be applied to Joey because he does not focus on a personal goal which would define his *self* in the same sense as Marie does. In the past he did have the potential and the aspiration to become a professional hockey player, along the lines of Bill Gaetano in *The Italians*, but he gave up his dream to maintain the unity of the family. Years ago, when Joey received a letter from a Junior hockey team down south, he chose not to pursue his dream.

> The scouts had seen him play and had confidentially told him there'd be no worry about making the team. And if he made the team, there'd be a good chance of playing professional hockey, which was his life-long dream. But his father had looked hurt beyond measure. His eyes downcast, his voice wavering, Adamo had said, "You want to leave home because of this?" (16-7)

The implication of Adamo's words is that hockey is "a boy's game," an activity which he neither values nor respects. But, more significantly, Adamo's response reflects his resistance to breaking up the family. Any other reason for leaving home would have elicited the same reaction from Adamo, as is the case when Marie leaves home to go to university in Toronto. But, whereas Marie pursued her goal despite her parents' opposition, Joey gave up a career opportunity in hockey in order to retain his father's respect and to

maintain the family unity. Since then, Joey works in the steel plant and considers himself a failure:

> A failure, Joey thought. He didn't care to improve his station. He had never felt himself a steelplant worker. It was only a temporary state of affairs. Ever since losing out in hockey he had been waiting for things to end, not to happen. He had turned inward, felt himself diminished. He was thus prone to a life of memories, introspection, and dreams, which was foreign to him. It was as if time had been held suspended since he was eighteen. Only when he played hockey did he feel alive as before. Hockey seemed to empty him inside. There was no innerness. He was no more and no less than what he did. (58-9)

As the last lines of the above passage suggest, Joey is uncomfortable with his sense of self. By playing hockey he is active rather than passive, which recalls his enthusiasm and his goals in earlier years. Joey is repressing his *self,* something which Paci suggests is negative.

As for Assunta, hers is a nonquest for identity because she has always lived someone else's life: her children's, her husband's. Given Marie's distance and indifference, and Joey's inattention, after Adamo's death Assunta is alone, with no contact with the world outside the home. Because there is no one left to define her existence, she embarks on a quest towards self-destruction. She embodies the same path towards destruction as that followed by the Barone family.

The flashback narration, or Marie's narrative, presents the

different stages of Marie's life: her development from childhood, to adolescence, to university, to marriage and motherhood. This level of narration illustrates Marie's quest to detach herself from her roots, which is in itself a process towards self-destruction. More importantly, it is the flashback narration which explains the process leading to the disidentity or disintegration of the Barone family in the main narration. In other words, the disintegration of the Barone family is triggered by Marie's dissention, her hatred – of the family and her*self*, the neighbourhood, the town, and everything that is Italian – her need to escape and to stay away from it all. In his essay "Hating the Self: John Marlyn and Frank Paci," Joseph Pivato emphasizes the extent of Marie Barone's self-hatred and compares it to Sandor Hunyadi's in John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death:*

> Marie Barone is self destructive in her attempt to escape the immigrant family and all things Italian. Her actions are more extreme than Sandor Hunyadi because she leaves home as soon as she can, rejects her mother and deforms her body through starvation. Where Sandor is made to feel inferior through the external prejudice of others, Marie has internalized this low valuing of the ethnic into all her thoughts and behaviour. (*Echo* 215)

Marie's detachment from her family is reflected in the process of narration given that she has her own level of narration, apart from the rest of the family. This puts her in the forefront: by breaking the main narration with Marie's, Paci is highlighting the importance of her quest.

The Marie Barone presented in the first chapter is detached and irreverent at her father's wake, unwilling to make an effort to communicate with her mother. Her unwillingness to be there is made explicit in her fear that her son, Michael, will be "contaminated" or traumatised by being there: "It's all right, Michael. . . . It'll all be over soon" (24). These words summarize Marie's attitude towards her family and the Italian community of the Sault. Marie's attitude is the same in Chapter 1, which presents the 30-year-old woman of the main narration, as it is in Chapter 2, which presents the 16-year-old Marie of the flashback narration. This image of Marie, both of the present and of the past, is in direct contrast to the one in the last chapter where she boards a plane for Italy wearing her mother's 30-year-old dress. The fact that Marie wears the dress and that she looks forward to her trip to the old country is an indication that she has come to terms with finding out who she really is. In the words of Joseph Pivato:

> All the time that Marie is trying to escape her family and Italian background she is also looking for a new sense of self, a new identity which she thinks she can create through her education and career. She finds that this is not enough. Only after her mother's tragic death does she begin to realize that her identity is bound up with her Italian roots and with her mother. Dressed as her mother Marie returns to Italy to find those family links. (*Echo* 216)

Until then Marie's quest was to deny who she is. It is only at the end of the novel that she embarks on a quest to find herself, as she

embarks on the plane. Her new attitude is also reflected in her reconciliation with her estranged husband, for, as Paci demonstrates in *Black Madonna* and in *The Father*, and Melfi shows in *Infertility Rites*, a person who does not have a clear image of her/his identity cannot possibly succeed in a relationship.

As discussed above, the process of narration in *Black Madonna* functions on two levels. The purpose of this bi-level narration is, first, to tell the story of the disintegration of the Barone family (main narration); second, to tell Marie's story by outlining the events which lead to her state of mind in the present (flashback narration); and, third, to show how Marie's attitude contributes to the disidentity of the family. In other words, Marie's narrative is told in flashback as a rationalization of what is recounted in the main narration. Thus, the levels of narration depend on one another. The point where the narration of the past catches up to the narration of the present is easily determined due to the chronological nature of both levels of narration. The flashback narration ends at Chapter 9, with the suggestion that Marie's marriage is breaking up, and this precedes the events in Chapter 1, which begins with Adamo Barone's wake and the indication that Marie is separated from her husband. The main narration covers a time span of less than a year: from winter (Adamo's funeral) to summer (Assunta dies in June and Marie leaves for Italy shortly thereafter). The flashback narration covers approximately fifteen years: Marie is sixteen in Chapter 2 and she is in her early thirties at the end of Chapter 9. It is significant to note that Marie's new quest for identity begins at the end of the main

narration. Why does it occur here? First, this allows the chronology of the main narration to continue. But more importantly, given that her new sense of self is provoked by her new attitude towards her family, and specifically by the death of her mother, it is appropriate that her new quest be presented in the main narration – that of the family. In acknowledging her roots, Marie allows a new identity for her family through the ties that she will strengthen with her relatives in Italy. At the same time, she permits a new identity for her immediate family, the Charltons. As Joseph Pivato writes, "The sad irony is that Marie and Joey only begin to appreciate their Italian roots after their father and mother are gone" ("The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature" 173). Paci demonstrates in *Black Madonna*, as was suggested in *The Italians* and *The Father,* that the second generation's search for self is sometimes at the cost of the disintegration of the family, or of the destruction of that which was accomplished by the first generation. Furthermore, when read as a trilogy, the three novels – *The Italians* (1978), *Black Madonna* (1982), *The Father* (1984) – show a progression of the Italian-Canadian identity: a move away from the confines of Italianness and towards a negotiated equilibrium between the components of the Italian-Canadian identity. This is particularly visible in the novels' representation of women. In the first generation, the progression goes from the voicelessness and isolation of Giulia (*The Italians*) and Assunta (*Black Madonna*) to the articulate Maddalena (*The Father*). In the second generation, Lorianna's (*The Italians*) voice is that of her family, while Marie is given the voice of the individual.

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III. *The Lion's Mouth*: Writing the Subordinate Narrative

Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* is similar to *Black Madonna* in that it presents two levels of narration which interrupt one another without warning: Bianca Mazzin's story (the Prologue, chapters 5, 9, 13, 17 and 20 (the Epilogue)) which takes place in western Canada and is narrated in the first person; and Marco's story (chapters 1 to 4, 6 to 8, 10 to 12, 14 to 16, 18 and 19) which takes place in Venice and is narrated in the third person. Both stories are about identity, displacement and truth. Marco's is about the deterioration of the self and the loss of an identity, whereas Bianca's is about finding the self and defining an identity. In this novel the first, which can be interpreted as Bianca's return journey, makes the second possible. Anna Pia De Luca makes the point that "both Marco's and Bianca's past move in a 'pas de deux', each informing the other and each shedding light on their respective present situation" (472).

Six of the twenty-one narrative divisions constitute the main narrative or the first level of narration (Bianca's story) whereas the remaining fifteen fall within the framework of Marco's story, which I will call the subordinate narrative or the second level of narration. The diagram below illustrates the structure of *The Lion's Mouth*.

Main Narration	Subordinate Narration
Prologue	
	1
	2
	3
	4
5	
	6
	7
	8
9	
	10
	11
	12
13	
	14
	15
	16
17	
	18
	19
20 (Epilogue)	

This division scheme results in thirty percent of the written text being dedicated to the main narrative and seventy percent to the subordinate narrative. Despite the fact that more space is alotted to Marco's narrative, the novel is clearly about Bianca's search for self, her need to create and establish her identity. Marco's narrative is instrumental in Bianca's quest for identity for it is by telling his story that she finds herself. Thus, much as Fabrizio cannot tell his story without telling that of his ancestors, Bianca cannot tell hers without telling Marco's. This structural and narrative embedding has a concentric effect on the novel as a whole. In the main level of narration Bianca tells about the process of writing Marco's story, but

she does not narrate the story here. The narrating of Marco's story is done by a third-person narrator in the subordinate level of narration. Thus, the embedding is both narrative and structural.

I would argue that the narrative scheme which frames the two levels of narration was purposely constructed to illustrate, through the process of narration, the search for self. Both narratives concentrate on identity. Marco's story is about the loss of self, the deterioration or destruction of an identity, disidentity. His identity is put into question as a husband, as a professional and as a law-abiding citizen. The Canadian, instead, has found herself. Ironically, she does this by creating/narrating the disidentity of her cousin, the self-assured young man who moulded her from rawness.

In *The Lion's Mouth,* Caterina Edwards has carefully set up the novel as a whole so as to illustrate a neat bridging of two cultures and two countries: the Italian and the Canadian. This Italian-Canadian duality is an integral part of the main narrator: it is a source of frustration and confusion, and at the same time it defines her existence. It is this duality which makes Bianca who she is, and she is fully aware of that. However, this duality needs to be clarified, to be put into perspective, and to be given a certain order. It is through the process of telling the tale that Bianca undertakes to establish that order, and by so doing will be able to define her sense of self, her cultural makeup, her identity. In fact, the process of narrating in the first person is reflective of a need to cleanse the self. In a confessional tone, Bianca says, "I wrote of Venice. I wrote of you, and I still do, not from choice but need. We must each of us

stare into the lion's mouth" (152). In other words, she writes to find truth, the truth of self. The recurring unsignalled shift from a Canadian context (main narration) to an Italian one (subordinate narration) results in a duality in the process of narration, a duality which the reader, too, is forced to experience given the randomness with which it is done.

Why does Bianca need to tell this specific tale? Why does it have to be set in Venice? Why does it have to be about Marco? The answers to these questions indicate that Bianca has succeeded in bringing her identity into focus. Bianca herself admits,

> I needed to exorcise my dream of Venice. I needed to rid myself of the ache of longing that I have carried for so long. And you [Marco] — you are the grain of sand that began the pearl that is my dream. (179)

Bianca's love for Venice and for Marco is an obsession which needs to be stored, filed away in the archives. Her previous attempts at writing a novel are part of the process of finding herself: they serve as a Bildungsroman "whereby Bianca can, at various intervals in her final version, journey into her past to reveal the stages of her maturation and final acceptance of self" (De Luca 472-3). The fourth narrative, "the final version," indicates that Bianca knows who she is.

Edwards has worked hard to present the two worlds – Italian and Canadian – simultaneously and in a way that is both well structured and intertwined. This form of presentation and narration (the levels of narration breaking one another), which brings both

cultures and both settings together and yet keeps them neatly separate, is reflective of the Italian-Canadian duality that Bianca must come to terms with. A person having Bianca's cultural makeup can call herself Italian, Canadian, Italian-Canadian or she may not be sure what to call herself. Certainly, the options to choose from in themselves point to the complexity of the situation. Making a choice implies having the clarity to define oneself. We have seen that, in certain novels under study in this thesis, characters such as Marie Barone and Nina DiFiore have a definite idea of the label that they want to endorse. Other characters, however, simply inhabit the space that exists between these terms, unable or unwilling to label themselves. Bianca knows that she is all of these and not one in particular. This is reflective of Bianca's sense of self: she is an Italian living in Canada, and she is a Canadian visiting Italy. As a child and adolescent she visited Italy nearly every summer; and, when she was not in Italy, her mind and her heart were nonetheless turned towards Italy.

A close analysis of the Prologue reveals that it serves its purpose in introducing the story at the level of content but also prepares the reader for the complexity of the process of narration which follows. The Prologue is narrated in the first person thereby positioning itself as part of the main narration. It begins with a need to establish order:

> I have spent the morning gardening, *uprooting* thistles and chickweed from between the zucchini and lettuce plants, hacking back a wild rose bush and the virginia creeper. I am

> floating in self-righteousness, in the image of myself as establisher of order, shaper of boundaries. (my italics, 9)

The narrator prides herself in having established a certain order in the garden, a confusion of cultivated vegetables and wild weeds. (After all, it is only if the plants are kept separate and weed-free that they will grow well and be fruitful.) This opening is a metaphoric foreshadowing of the narrator's objective in narrating this story. The reader will discover that the narrator aims to establish order in her*self* through the process of narration (the narrating of her love for an Italian cousin who lives in Venice), a self which has been *uprooted* and exists between two realities symbolized by the vegetation in her garden: the cultivated Italian environment and the wilderness of Western Canada. Thus, the importance of the narrator's gardening activity becomes relevant: the opening scene immediately links the narrator to the land, to manual labor, to growing one's own produce – all of which are associated with the old country. Ironically, however, the narrative which allows the narrator to establish order is set in Venice, a city built on water. The fluidity of this setting implies instability (flooding; the destruction of supports) which goes hand in hand with Marco's story: the psychological breakdown, the loss of self.

The subject of the second paragraph, the letter which has arrived from Italy, points to a number of elements that are essential to the process of narration. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between the letter and the process of narration undertaken by Bianca to

establish order. First, the letter itself represents the bridge between the two worlds, the two cultures:

> Your mother's letter waits, between my *New Yorker* and *NeWest Review*. It was mailed exactly four months ago. Italian and Canadian postal services, plus a casual strike, have produced the usual level of efficiency. (9)

The (Italian) letter is personified as waiting. This is significant of the Italian within Bianca which must wait for self-expression: either by returning to Italy during the summer or by the narrator's conscious effort to address this Italian within her. The latter is not easily done given the North American context that Bianca inhabits. (Writing (about) the Italian within her has met with procrastination.) This context is reflected in the letter waiting "between" two North American publications. It is significant, too, that the publications are literary and cultural which is in direct contrast to the gossipy and confusing discourse of the writer of the letter, Bianca's aunt – an uneducated old woman from the old country.

Furthermore, the process of bridging, or the completion of the bridge, has been delayed by four months due to the postal service of both countries. Thus, the narrator is consciously attributing responsibility to the delay on both the Italian and Canadian. I would argue that this "delay" is symbolic of the narrator's procrastination in undertaking the process of narration. This narrative in its beginning has actually begun to do what the letter has done by arriving: that is, bridge the two cultures, the two sides which make up Bianca's identity. The narrator has attempted to narrate this tale

on three previous occasions, all of which were interrupted. Thus, the words "a casual strike" are especially significant in that they point to the interruption of the mailing process which is symbolic of Bianca interrupting her writing/narrating.

The four month delay points to the temporal distance of the letter's contents. Therefore, what is news to the reader of the letter is no longer news to the writer of those events. This temporal distance also exists within the process of narration. There is not only a physical distance between the main narrative and the subordinate one due to the gap created by the Atlantic Ocean, but there is also a temporal distance in that the tale that we will be told has been told earlier on three separate occasions, in three different ways: "In the top drawer of the filing cabinet in the basement, there are three attempts at a novel . . ." (10). The reader is being prepared for this here. And immediately the wording of this sentence points to the concentric element or the "box within a box syndrome" of the narrative. The narrator insists on specifying, on giving the accurate detail of where her writing is to be found: in the top drawer which is in the filing cabinet which is in the basement. The location could simply have been "in the filing cabinet." The wording of this sentence immediately emphasizes the importance that the narrator gives to detail, to order and to precision. The implication seems to be that the reader will have to read with the same attention. This is essential because the narrative itself is anything but orderly. It is like a maze, causing confusion, questions and uncertainty with every

new paragraph. In this sense it is reflective of the maze of Venice and of the confusion of the Italian-Canadian identity.

Secondly, the narrator hesitates between reading the letter immediately and reading it later: "I toss the letter down. Better to wait until I'm cool and clean, iced drink in hand. But after one step, I turn back" (9). Hesitation, dwindling, ambiguity – the narrator's traits are present in this sentence. These same traits are present in the main narrative given that the narrator has procrastinated until now to begin this tale, and she has written three versions of the tale, none of which remains definite. She is now determined that the fourth tale will be the final version: "I wash my hands with lavender scented soap. I soak my wrists in cool water. It is time again to lift the pen. It is time to succeed" (11). Thus, the letter which has physically bridged the two countries is instrumental in pushing the narrator to begin the process of narration which will in turn "bridge" her identity gap – the gap between her "selves."

Thirdly, the narrator points to the form and tone used in the letter:

> . . . my dear aunt's letters, no matter the content, repel in form and in tone. She covers each inch of tissue-thin paper with what seems, to my Canadian eyes, illegible handwriting. (Though, to be fair, she finds my standard school script bizarre and aberrant.) She scorns punctuation, the sentences tumble, gasp, and sputter across the page. And the voice behind those poor sentences, need I tell you, pours out, complains, bemoans: endlessly. (9)

This passage is significant because by pointing to the form and tone

of the letter the narrator brings the form and tone of her narrative to the foreground. Again, the reader is warned to pay attention to these elements. The narrator's script is "bizarre" and "aberrant" compared to the letter's. This immediately contrasts the Italian and the Canadian contexts, thus foreshadowing the subordinate narrative set in Italy and putting it in direct contrast to the main narrative set in Canada. Furthermore, it implies that the narrator's tale will deviate from the norm. And, it does. It is a narrative within a narrative which forces the reader to pay close attention to time, space and place. And the narrative within the narrative which is (in) Italian will be different from the aunt's illegible script; this narrative will be easier to follow than the main narrative which causes temporal and spatial confusion. But this confusion is necessary to establish the order which the narrator craves. Thus, the first page of the novel is self-reflexive of the main narrative, a microcosm of the main narration in that it introduces all of the essential elements and tensions at work in the novel as a whole.

The Prologue does what by definition it is designed to do: introduce the narrative. The Prologue prepares the reader for the complexity of the narrative, in content – identity, dualities, binaries – and in form. In other words, it is almost as if the narrative can be read as two separate narratives, like *Black Madonna,* but each only works if it is read simultaneously with the other. And yet, despite the Prologue's function – to prepare the reader – the reader is still surprised by the shift in narrator which occurs in Chapter 1. The reader is misled into thinking that Marco's story is the main

narrative: it is only much later that the reader discovers that Bianca's is the main narrative.

The link between both narratives, however, is established by making Marco simultaneously the subject of the subordinate narrative and the narratee of the main narrative. This is established on the second page: " 'Worse, Marco (you, you) suffered a nervous breakdown' " (10). It is interesting to look at how this link is established and interwoven into the text. Although the narratee's presence is signalled in the second paragraph ["Your mother's letter waits . . ." (9)], it is not until this sentence – "Worse, Marco (you, you) . . ." – that his identity is revealed. And, importantly, it is revealed in a quote from the letter written by the narratee's mother: given in parentheses and repeated twice, "(you, you)." The use of parentheses gives the impression that it is done for the reader's sake, for clarity. I would argue that it is done to maintain the presence of the narratee and to establish the link before his story, the deterioration of an identity, begins. It is important to note that "you" is repeated twice in the sentence which informs the narrator and the reader of the narratee's (Marco's) nervous breakdown. This, I think, is pertinent to the tale of identity which will be told. In fact, the sentence itself which informs us of a nervous breakdown illustrates the broken self (of the narratee/Marco) by the break caused by "you, you." Thus, by closely "breaking down" the sentence, Marco's selves are exposed thereby pointing to a tale of unstable identity. And, it is essential to keep in mind that the "(you, you)" equals the narratee which equals Marco, who is the subject of the subordinate tale which is necessary

to tell Bianca's tale and thereby ensure her sense of order and her own identity.

Caterina Edwards has structured the novel so that a link is constantly maintained between the main narrative and the subordinate one, while at the same time causing breaks from narrative to narrative for which the reader has been prepared and yet at which s/he is surprised. The break in the main narration by the subordinate narration only occurs at the beginning of a new chapter. In other words, the two levels of narration do not occur within the same chapter.

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IV. Fabrizio's Confusion

The process of narration in Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* is particularly complex given that it is a multivoiced narrative told through various genres – epistolary, journal entries, filmscript, photographs – but with no sense of order. *Fabrizio's Passion* has been called a baroque novel: it is, in fact, a cacophony of events and narrators presented in a seemingly haphazard way. Antonio D'Alfonso has said of his novel that it must work no matter what the order is: "Si le roman peut se tenir en inversant les chapitres, c'est que le lien sémantique se fait et que l'oeuvre est réussie" (See Royer). The specific (dis)order in which events are presented in *Fabrizio's Passion* is purposely done to illustrate the

state of confusion experienced by Fabrizio Notte. The disorder which characterizes the process of narration illustrates Fabrizio's search for identity.

In the article quoted above, D'Alfonso says: "Le baroque retenu constitue l'essence de la culture italienne . . . Le fil conducteur, ce n'est pas l'action mais l'émotion" (See Royer). In other words, the disordered baroque structure has an affinity with Italian culture, that culture being presented in the narrative. Thus, the content, or the emotionality of the content, is reflected in the process of narration. Therefore, the implication here is that the reader is to make her/his way through the novel by concentrating on the emotions illustrated as opposed to the sequence of events. Emotion is what guides the narrative as revealed in chapter titles such as "Disamore," "Friends and Jealousy," "Romance" and "Nightmare."

Chapter 5, entitled "Scars," illustrates the notion of emotion over event. Five separate events are narrated, without signalling the transition from one to the other, each of which results in a scar. Fabrizio begins the narration with the following:

> Let's speak about these scars, for they bring me back to my history, to my origins, to what has made me the one I am today, physically speaking. The relief of each scar carries the memory of an incident, a moment whose ephermality will not vanish. (66)

The event is not as important as the scar by which the emotion surrounding the event is remembered. For instance, it is not the scar

obtained from riding the red wagon in the country which is important but the joy of spending the summer with his Canadian cousins. What Fabrizio does not say is that these scars have made him who he is psychologically as well as physically.

The process of narration reflects the confusion within the context of the story: first, as expressed through the main narrator's search for self amid a tricultural (Italian, French-Quebecois, English-Canadian) daily experience; second, by incorporating events and anecdotes at random which span the three cultures; and third, by giving a voice in the process of narration to characters who span diverse cultures (Italian, Hungarian, Italian-Canadian, Italian-Quebecois) and several generations (grandmother, parents, sister). (A detailed discussion of the narrators will be given in Chapter 4.)

Despite the lack of order in the process of narration in *Fabrizio's Passion*, the first four chapters maintain the chronology of events. These chapters reveal Fabrizio Notte's origins, the circumstances and events (war, poverty, love) which lead to his birth in a country which is not his parents'. It is therefore appropriate that his parents narrate that which occurred before Fabrizio's birth. The order and chronology maintained within these early chapters is also appropriate given that Fabrizio's confusion begins much later, in childhood. Moreover, the chronology and the orderliness of the early chapters provide a direct contrast to the disorder and confusion which permeates the process of narration in the novel as a whole.

Chapter 1, entitled "My Mother's Diary," is set in Guglionesi (Italy) in April 1944. The reader is given a bleak picture of daily life

in a small Italian town under German occupation. As the title of the chapter indicates, this is an excerpt of a diary (entries from April 2 to 26, 1944; 19 entries in all), and we are to presume from the title of the chapter that it is a "mother's diary." The fact that there is no evidence in the diary entries that the narrator is a mother raises some questions: Who is the mother? And whose narratorial voice is detected in the chapter title "*My* Mother's Diary" (my italics)? It is only in Chapter 4 that the reader infers that Fabrizio's mother is the writer of these diary entries.

Chapter 2, "Father's Military Service,"[24] is a collection of letters written by Fabrizio's father detailing his post-war military service in northern Italy. These twelve letters were written from April 2 to April 25, 1948. Whereas in Chapter 1 the reader does not know whose mother the diary is ascribed to, in Chapter 2 the introductory and concluding paragraphs which frame the letters indicate that their writer is the narrator's father. Yet, the son-narrator's identity remains a mystery.

Chapter 3, which is entitled "The Crossing," describes the journey by ship from Italy to Canada undertaken by Lina (Fabrizio's mother) and Titina (her best friend). Despite some misgivings, both young women decide to join their boyfriends in Canada: "Had it not been for the hope of a better life at the other end of the world, Titina and I would never have left Italy" (39). The chapter presents the

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[24] Note the lack of the possessive pronoun and the implications of this; why is it *My* Mother's Diary and not *My* Father's Military Service. This seems to suggest an affinity for the mother, although he takes the trouble to "shed some light on the kind of person that his father was" (19).

incidents which occur during the crossing in April 1950, thereby maintaining the chronology of the process of narration. This chapter is noteworthy because it is the first to present a non-static process of narration, in contrast to the diary and epistolary form of the first two chapters.

The first three chapters indicate through the three narrative genres used that the novel will be a mixture of things. And even more so it sets the stage for a narrative which will provoke the reader to ask questions. D'Alfonso breaks the process of narration by using mechanisms such as digressions, flashbacks, switching narrator, and the presence of Italian words. All of this causes an atmosphere of confusion which demands the reader's alertness. This element of confusion or doubt, of not knowing exactly who is speaking or not knowing what the time frame is, creates a specific atmosphere and gives the reader a unique experience. I would suggest that D'Alfonso aims to create for the reader the same sort of experience, although on a different level, as that experienced by Fabrizio in his attempt to find himself – that same state of confusion ascribed to his father in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 begins with this sentence: "My father buys the house on 19th Avenue in April 1959 . . ." (47). This first sentence establishes that the chapter follows the chronological order of the previous three because the setting is Montreal in 1959, nine years after the events presented in Chapter 3. More importantly, the use of the present tense ("My father *buys*") for an action that has obviously occurred in the past is significant because it alerts the reader that the present, or

the setting (Canada) of Fabrizio's life experience, has been reached. In other words the author has decided to delineate the previous three chapters as part of the past, the events which needed to be told before the telling of this chapter is possible. The present tense is used in the first two chapters because it is appropriate to the genre used: diary and epistolary form. However, the reader realizes later on that the present tense is used throughout the process of narration. The result is that the reader is obliged to be present – to witness what is being narrated; the narrator does not grant the distance which would allow the reader to be uninvolved. Consequently, the roles of observer and accomplice are forced onto the reader. In other words, the reader accompanies Fabrizio on his quest, which is interrupted by numerous digressions. Thus, it is noticeable early on in the narrative that the main narrator expects everyone, other characters and the reader, to get involved.

In *Fabrizio's Passion*, the process of narration does begin at the beginning, with Fabrizio's parents narrating his roots and setting the stage for his narration. The fourth chapter, while maintaining the chronology, presents the main narrator who tells about the trials of a childhood in an Italian family living in Montreal: from a detailed description of the first house his parents buy, to the controversy of choosing an English language school over a French language school, the death of his grandfather, and the superiority of the brother over the sister, to his friendship with Mario Berger. One of the lengthiest chapters, it attempts to illustrate the cacophony that constitutes Fabrizio's childhood, thereby preparing the reader for the same

confusion in the process of narration which follows. In other words, Fabrizio seems to suggest that his roots and his upbringing necessarily lead to his state of confusion.

The temporal chronology maintained in the narration of the first four chapters of *Fabrizio's Passion* is indicative of Fabrizio's clear sense of his origins and of their effect on his daily existence. The rest of the novel does not present the events in chronological order: it does not matter which chapter is read first. This disorder reflects the confusion that Fabrizio lives with: although he knows that his roots are in Italy, his difficulty lies in finding harmony between his heritage and his every day Canadian reality.

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The discussion undertaken in this chapter indicates that the process of narration reflects the duality and the tension inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. Each novel analysed here, in its own way, illustrates the quest for identity through the telling of the tale. As multileveled narratives, *Fabrizio's Passion*, *The Lion's Mouth*, *The Father*, *Black Madonna* and *The Italians* illustrate the characters' personal confusion and cultural duality. The fact that the telling or the narration does not unfold in a linear or direct fashion is purposely done to reflect the complex reality of the Italian-Canadian experience. Although this confusion remains unresolved for certain characters such as Fabrizio and is resolved for others such as Bianca, there is solace in the act of narrating her/his story. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: The Narrator

This chapter discusses the teller of the tale, specifically the first-person narrator.[25] Of the seven novels under study in this thesis, four use the first-person narrator: *In a Glass House* (Vittorio Innocente), *Fabrizio's Passion* (Fabrizio Notte), *Infertility Rites* (Nina DiFiore), and *The Lion's Mouth* (Bianca Mazzin). In these novels, the narrator plays a key role in illustrating the question of identity and agency, which concentrates on the struggle in dealing with one's otherness and the feeling of incompleteness and nonbelonging. Each narrative is essentially about the narrator's search for self, and the act of narrating is an important step in her/his quest for identity. It is by telling her/his story that the protagonist is able to focus on her/his identity. Thus, the telling of the tale illustrates the quest for identity. In other words, the negotiating which occurs at the thematic level between the Italian and the Canadian is very much a part of the narrative perspective and a characteristic of the narrator. The process of negotiation is clearly visible in the constant shifting which occurs between the past and the present, thereby creating different layers of narration and different narratorial voices. The constant shifting from one time/setting to another is reflective of the constant shifting and negotiating within the emerging Italian-Canadian subjectivity.

In *Narrative Fiction,* Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan gives a helpful definition of the narrator as being "the agent which at the

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[25] The focus of my analysis is the first-person narrator and how the telling of her/his tale functions as a cleansing of the self and provides some understanding of her/his bicultural identity. This is not the case with the third-person narrator. Therefore, although I feel compelled to discuss the third-person narrator, I will do so only briefly at the end of this chapter.

very least narrates or engages in some activity serving the needs of narration" (88). Another theorist of narrative, Mieke Bal, emphasizes that the narrator is never a character in the story even in first-person narratives: "The narrator is the same person, but at another moment and in another situation than when s/he originally experienced the events" (8). Bal distinguishes these two "moments" as the narrator and the focalizer. Although Bal's terminology is more current, in the discussion that follows I will speak mostly of the narrating self or narrating "I" and the experiencing self or experiencing "I" to distinguish between the two phases of the narratorial "I" (See Stanzel 212-3). The term "experiencing self" is clearly associated with the past whereas the "narrating self" is connected to the here and now of the narrative.

During the process of narration in the first-person novels under study, the narrating self or the narrator looks back at and narrates events which occurred at different points in the past. And it is the experiencing self or the focalizer who participates in this past action. The distinction between the two "I's" is the following: the experiencing "I" participates in past events through action and through dialogue; the narrating "I" comments on these events and conversations at a distance. During this sequence, the action points to an experiencing self who is incomplete, one who does not belong, lacks self-esteem, or has no sense of who s/he is. In fact, the narrating self's main preoccupation is, first, to illustrate the experiencing self as incomplete and, second, to show the progression in the quest for identity: the growth from incomplete self towards a

more complete/fulfilled self. The narrating self participates in the quest for identity in two ways: first, as an observer of what she has experienced in the past; and second, as a participant during the process of narration. In other words, the fact that the narrating self is performing the act of narrating is a step in the quest for identity which will eventually provide a sense of closure. If we compare the two selves on the level of completeness, the experiencing self is incomplete and the narrating self is closer to being complete. This having been said, the self never attains completeness given that it is constantly changing: "at any given moment the self is different from itself at any other given moment" (Smith 56). Once the process of narration ends, the narrating self has either attained a better sense of self in comparison to the experiencing self, or the narrating self has realized her/his limitations and the need for an improved self. By the end of her narration in *Infertility Rites*, for example, Nina DiFiore acknowledges that (the birth of) a child will not define her identity but rather that she must have a sense of her own identity before bringing a child into the world. And, *The Lion's Mouth* ends with Bianca Mazzin's sense of satisfaction after having narrated her development towards a positive sense of self.

The internal tension between the experiencing self and the self as narrator is the characteristic feature of the first-person narrative. F.K. Stanzel provides a useful explanation:

> The narrative distance separating the two phases of the narratorial 'I' temporally, spatially and psychologically, is generally a measure of the intensity of the process of

> experience and education to which the narrating self was subjected before it began the narration of its story. (212-3)

From the beginning of the process of narration, the attitude of the narrating self towards the experiencing self determines the rapport between the two selves and establishes how much ground has been covered in the search for self. Stanzel writes that the narrative distance between the two narratorial selves takes a variety of forms which range "from identification to complete estrangement." In the novels discussed here, the distance or proximity between the two selves varies from novel to novel. *In a Glass House* presents a narrating Vittorio who dislikes and, therefore, attempts to distance himself from the experiencing self. In *Infertility Rites,* the narrating self and the experiencing self portray a very bitter Nina. The narrating self in *The Lion's Mouth* is very sympathetic towards the experiencing Bianca. Stanzel's point then is well taken given that both Nina and Vittorio have quite a bit of work to do to find out who they are, whereas Bianca has already attained that self-knowledge at the outset of the narrative.

In this section, I will discuss the role of the experiencing self and the narrating self, and the relationship between them, in the quest for identity as presented in the four first-person novels treated in this thesis: *The Lion's Mouth, Infertility Rites, Fabrizio's Passion* and *In a Glass House.* Although *In a Glass House* spans a longer narration time and covers more geographical space than *The Lion's Mouth, Infertility Rites* and *Fabrizio's Passion,* all four texts have long internal narratorial monologues which demonstrate the

narrator's lack of self-esteem and the need to find a response to the question "Who am I?" In Melfi's novel the temporal distance between the narrating self and the experiencing self is closer than in Ricci's novel. For the most part, the experiencing self which Nina narrates has to do with incidents pertaining to pregnancy which occur in the not-so-distant past. The Nina of the distant past – childhood and adolescence – is not presented as the experiencing self, but she is shown through the narrating self's recollection of specific incidents. On the other hand, in Ricci's novel as in Edwards' and D'Alfonso's the experiencing self is presented from childhood through adolescence and adulthood, with the narrating self making occasional comments. Moreover, unlike the other three novels, *In a Glass House* presents a linear narration. The different techniques used to present the two narratorial selves results in immediacy in Melfi's *Infertility Rites* and distance in the other novels.

* * * * *

I. *Infertility Rites*

In *Infertility Rites*, the narration of the present is repeatedly interrupted by the recollection of incidents in the past, specifically those which illustrate Nina's unconventional behaviour and her mother's criticism: the unruly child whose mother never told her she is loved; and the free-spirited university student whose mother calls her a *zingara* (gypsy) and *putana* (whore) because she shifts

from city to city and from man to man. For the most part, the experiencing self which Nina narrates has to do with incidents pertaining to pregnancy which occur in the not-so-distant past. The Nina of childhood and adolescence is shown through the narrating self's recollection of specific incidents. Nina's identity crisis stems from lack of self-esteem and the frustration resulting from her inability to take a pregnancy to term. Here, the quest for identity is presented as the quest to give birth. This identity crisis is reflected in the process of narration through tone and sentence structure, and it is evident as of the first paragraph: "Reduced to one wish: the wish to conceive, to get pregnant, to create new flesh . . ." (5). The abruptness with which the narrative begins and the absence of a subject immediately establish the narrator's identity crisis. The fact that the "I" is missing suggests the need to find it: to answer not only "who" but also "where" is the "I," the subject of the sentences, the narrator. The abrupt and incomplete sentences suggest the narrator's very state of incompleteness.

The words "Reduced to" reflect Nina's sense of self: they convey a downward shift. Nina DiFiore had not expected that her only goal in life would be to get pregnant. She has been "reduced to" the woman she despises: a woman, dependent on her husband, who wants to experience motherhood. According to Nina this is equivalent to her traditional, Italian side, and she resents that her present situation is too close to what her mother wants for her. She had vowed that motherhood was out of place in her life: "Children were reserved for uneducated women with no great aims in life . . ."

(6). Three years prior, when she thought she was pregnant, she had considered having an abortion because her career as an artist was her first priority. The experiencing Nina was a feminist in revolt against her Italian traditional background; the narrating Nina is forced to acknowledge that she is a feminist in theory only. Thus, through the act of narrating, Nina revisits her "selves": the "carefree Canadian" of the past and the "more Italian" of the not-so-distant past.

The tone of self-disesteem manifested in the first paragraph of *Infertility Rites* is in direct contrast with the tone of the last paragraph of the same section: "I will make what does not exist, exist. . . . I will win this game of clocks, fair and square. I have more life in me (we) than you think" (5). This passage illustrates the narrator's willpower, her strength and her determination. As the narrative will show, however, this quest becomes an obsession which proves detrimental to other facets of the narrator's existence. The passage also indicates her motivation for, besides her need to have a child in order to define herself, the last line ["I have more life in me (we) than you think."] reveals that she also has something to prove to the narratee, the "you." Two questions arise from this line: Who is the narratee? And who does the "we" refer to? The narratee is obviously someone who opposes Nina's objective, and in the next section it is revealed that Daniel, Nina's husband, does not want a child. Nina, then, is addressing her husband. It can be surmised that the "we" from which Nina gets support against Daniel and everything that he stands for (the intellectual, conservative,

anglosaxon) refers to her Italian heritage, the immigrants. However, the "we" may also refer to the bond between Nina and the child she will give birth to.

The first section of Chapter 1 – the four paragraphs discussed above – show Nina DiFiore's commitment to fight against all odds in order to attain her objective. It resembles a war cry: the enemy being the "you" of the last sentence. However, despite the narrator's assertive tone in this section, the rest of the chapter, and the rest of the novel, reveals a very different narrator: one who is more akin to the obsessive and downtrodden narrator of the first paragraph. The confessional narrative alternately presents a strong Nina who is determined to get what she wants and a discouraged Nina weakened by the odds against her. This duality illustrates the confusion and ambiguity inherent in her bicultural identity and is manifested by the two phases of the narratorial "I." Nina, the experiencing self, was at odds with Italianness as represented by her mother; now Nina, the narrating self, is in conflict with the Canadian as represented by her husband. The first chapter presents a series of shifts from narrating self to experiencing self through recollections of the past and through dialogue, thereby illustrating the conflict which has so upset the narrator. The section is narrated hurriedly in order to bring the reader up to date, giving such details as age and status, which makes it seem almost stagelike:

> [experiencing self:] 'Why can't we have a baby?' I ask the fine arts professor for the *n*th time this year. [narrating

> self:] An aggressive twenty-eight-year-old responding to her biological clock.
>
> 'Three years ago when you thought you were pregnant, you considered having an abortion. You blamed me for doing it to you.'
>
> [experiencing self:] 'I remember.'
>
> [narrating self:] Remembering: I was then only too ready to dismiss the so-called joys of motherhood. Children were reserved for uneducated women with no great aims in life, but my career in the arts was to launch me to the stars. (6)

The shift from the present to the recollection is signalled by the word "Remembering" which is something of a stagelike cue. Furthermore, that shift from one narratorial self to the other is also a shift in Nina's identity: the ambitious artist of the past who did not want children, and the unfulfilled woman of the present who craves a child. There is very little distance between one narratorial voice and the other. The narrator shifts easily from one "self" to the other with or without signals. This results in a minimal distance between the two narratorial selves, which sometimes makes it difficult to discern which is speaking, as in the next passage for example:

> I see no evidence that Daniel will pick up his pen and write his book. . . . But he does find the time to read spy novels, see horror movies, and play the games usually reserved for members of private clubs. (10)

The voice is very close to that of the narrating self, but it is in fact that of the experiencing self of the immediate past. I would argue

that the narrow distance between the two narratorial selves points to the intricacy of Nina's bicultural identity: both the Italian and the Canadian are components of Nina's identity, but it is difficult to clearly distinguish one from the other because she inhabits the space between them.

Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* is about pregnancy and the self. More importantly, the novel illustrates how Nina's desire to have a child provokes an identity crisis which puts into question her self-definition. In other words, Nina's self-image as "the Canadian" – career-oriented, "Mrs. Middle-Class America," and "an exemplary Wasp" – is shattered by the natural desire to have a child which she associates with the Italian component of her identity. In so far as Nina "the Canadian" is shown through the experiencing "I" and Nina "the Italian" is revealed through the narrating "I," the two phases of the narratorial "I" signal Nina's cultural duality.

* * * * *

II. *In a Glass House*

In Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* there is a clear distinction and distance between Vittorio's narratorial selves given that the experiencing "I" moves from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, but the narrating "I" is older and more introspective. The distance between the two "I's" is further evident when the narrating self contradicts what the experiencing self illustrates. The

thread that guides the narrative, and the narratorial selves, is loneliness and the inability to fit in. The narrating "I" takes great pains to show that his sense of incompleteness is experienced in school (elementary, high school and university), in the family (immediate and extended) and in the activities of the farm. Early in the narrative Vittorio's narrating self says, ". . . I seemed to belong to no one, the life going on in the house . . . and I myself, alone there at the roadside, like an aberration in a picture, the thing when all else was accounted for that didn't fit" (45). Later on Vittorio admits, ". . . something crucial was missing in me, normal human emotion, the way I reacted to things with only this emptiness at the centre of me" (129). Certainly, the narrative action shows Vittorio's discomfort in society. However, the narrating self focusses on this sense of incompleteness even when the narrative action demonstrates a Vittorio who belongs. For example, the experiencing self is shown to fit in to the family at social events, on festive occasions, and while working on the farm, but the narrating self recalls feelings of nonbelonging during this action. I would argue that the narrative aims to create a disjunction between what is said and what is shown thereby pointing to the narrator's unreliabity. Furthermore, as discussed below, these contradictions are inherent in the shifts in narratorial subject, from "I" to "we."

i. The Shift in Narratorial Subject

Filippo Salvatore writes that "Through Vittorio, Ricci . . .

expresses the main theme of *In a Glass House,* which is the migration of identity" (112). Salvatore is referring to Ricci's main character, but I would emphasize that this is true, even more so, of Vittorio's narrating self. In this novel in particular, more so than in *The Italians,* the quest for identity is twofold: it is of course that of the narrator, Vittorio Innocente, but it is also that of the family. In Paci's *The Italians,* the familial quest for identity is represented in the levels of narration whereas in Ricci's novel it is illustrated through the narrator. Earlier, I spoke of the incomplete self as pertains to the individual's quest for identity; here, I will discuss the incomplete family as presented in *In a Glass House.* The shift from incompleteness to completeness, on the individual and familial levels, is evidenced in the narratorial voice in the shift from "I" to "we." Vittorio's quest is intricately linked to the family's quest. The fact that the Innocente family is an incomplete entity is a major factor in Vittorio's inability to find himself.

Vittorio is very much affected by the perception that his family lacks a certain "normalcy." His family is not only dysfunctional, it lacks the components of the traditional (Italian) family. The Innocente family contains an unwanted illegitimate daughter, Rita, who is not an Innocente (irony of the name here) and whose link to the Innocente family is through Vittorio alone (they share the same mother). Because the Innocentes, namely the father, cannot get past the "dishonour" that Rita represents, the family defines itself by the foreign element it harbours. Rita is not seen as a child but as her mother's sin, and therefore her presence

causes an "eggshell order" (39). Even Vittorio has mixed feelings towards his half-sister: he rejects her as the cause of his misery and his family's disgrace, but at the same time he feels the need to protect her because she is the only one that he belongs to. Furthermore, Aunt Teresa is not an appropriate substitute for a mother, and Mario Innocente is an enraged and estranged father who hardly communicates with anyone. It is no wonder, then, that Vittorio hates his family and would like to see it destroyed: ". . . as though it were my deep monstrous wish now to see our family destroyed, to watch its slow fuse burn to some pure and final violence" (124). The desire for self-destruction present within Vittorio is also transferred to his family. Perhaps, Ricci is pointing to the narrow definition of "family" within the Italian culture and suggesting that it be redefined in the new country given the more liberal Canadian mentality. This is further evidenced by the fact that some Canadian families – namely Chrystal's and the Amhersts' – presented in the narrative do not follow the conventional notion of the family.

Vittorio's family undergoes several shifts: first, the Mario Innocente family: Mario, Vittorio, Rita; second, the Mario Innocente family: Mario, Vittorio, Rita, Aunt Teresa; third, the Mario Innocente family: Mario, Vittorio, Aunt Teresa; and fourth, the extended Innocente family: Mario, Vittorio, Aunt Teresa and Uncle Umberto's family (Umberto, Taormina, Domenic, Rocco, Fiorina). Other concepts of the family are presented as a contrast to the Innocente family through Crystal, the Amhersts, and Vince. Vittorio "tries on" these families to see what it would be like to live

in a family other than his own. Crystal's all-woman household gives him a chance to see a family which, like his own, is incomplete: ". . . I seemed to have entered there as by a kind of inevitability, this house of women I'd somehow become the man of, there to complete its half-familyness with my own" (171). The Amhersts provide "a different idea of what family" (148) is, an idea which loses its appeal once Vittorio discovers that Elena is adopted. Vince's home is an alternative Italian family which appeals to Vittorio:

> Sometimes I'd linger in his living room with a beer until it was too late to go back to school for the bus and I'd have to wait for Vince's father to return from the fishery with the car, *seeming then to try on Vince's home like some more comfortable suit of clothes* before returning to my own.
> (my italics, 158)

The passage emphasizes the awkwardness Vittorio feels towards his own family. Vittorio lingers purposely because he feels more comfortable in Vince's home than his own. It is important to note that the family that he aspires to is a traditional Italian family. Just as Vittorio is constantly trying to focus on the role that he should play – the Vittorio that he should be – he is also trying to find the family that his should be by comparing it to others.

Finally, with the purchase of a television, Vittorio sees the possibility of a utopian family on the screen and within his home (89). Television provides a new family schedule and a sense of togetherness. Vittorio's father concedes to Rita's wish to watch

Lassie, going so far as changing dinnertime so that the children can watch the program. The television becomes the hearth of the family, and the family becomes more intimate. Vittorio says, "I had a sense then that perhaps things could be all right with us, that we could live in a kind of protective normalcy like a television family" (92).

Of the different shifts in the Innocente family dynamics mentioned above, it is the fourth one which makes Vittorio feel closest to normalcy or completeness. By its presence, Umberto's family fills the gap in Vittorio's family, hiding its abnormality and thereby giving it a sense of wholeness. Vittorio feels the least comfortable in his immediate family (with or without Rita) and the most when Umberto's family is present. This is particularly evident on festive occasions as well as during farming activities. The level of Vittorio's (dis)comfort manifests itself in the narratorial voice: passages on his immediate family have a negative and resigned tone whereas passages which include his uncle's family have a more positive and calm tone. The latter is true during farming activities:

> We worked cut off from each other, lost in the separate hush of the walls our rows formed, the greenhouse sounds reaching us there like jungle static, the crack and hiss of the steam pipes, the tiny background drone of the old car speakers Rocco had connected up to a radio in the boiler room. (138)

This passage lacks the tension which is evident in passages describing the Mario Innocente family. In the latter case, the choice of diction and sentence structure suggests the disruption and tension

that are inherent within the family, as in the following: "crippled family" (70) and "an odd silent family joined in its awkwardness and injury" (78). Vittorio emphasizes his family's vulnerability once Uncle Umberto's family leaves:

> With my uncle's family gone our household seemed stripped down again to its essence, all of us suddenly *dangerously visible,* lacking the spectacle of Tsi'Umberto's arguments to distract us from the *awkwardness of one another's presence.* We retreated to our separate rooms . . . . The living room took on an air of abandonment . . . like a recess at the centre of us awaiting *the family we couldn't be.* (my italics, 81)

This passage, compared to the one quoted previously, shows the tension and awkwardness which defines the Innocente family. The presence of Umberto's family acts like a protective shield against this *malaise.* Vittorio looks forward to being reunited with his uncle's family:

> Oddly, their departure left no sense of relief in our house, only a strange lethargy, a torpor thick as sleep. . . . It appeared only a matter of time by then before we'd be back more or less where we'd begun, a single family, bound by some twisted allegiance that infected us like an illness . . . (79)

The tone here is hopeful, as if the union of the two families is a measure of salvation for Vittorio and his immediate family.

When the extended Innocente family is present, Vittorio narrates from the perspective of the familial collectivity. The shift from "I" to "we" in the narrating subject illustrates the sense of

completeness that Uncle Umberto's family brings to Vittorio's. As quoted above, there is a sense of unity in passages which describe the family working on the farm. Moreover, the shift from "I" to "we" is visible when the members of the extended family align against elements which are considered foreign to the familial sphere, specifically when these elements represent Canadianness. The familial allegiance is evident when the Amhersts unexpectedly visit the Innocentes at Christmas as well as in the family's unexplained resistance to Colie, Aunt Teresa's suitor. In the first instance, Vittorio says: "For all the shame *I* felt when they'd gone, still it seemed *we*'d somehow got the better of them, had given up less ground than they had" (my italics, 151). Here, the shift from "I" to "we" occurs in the same sentence and points to Vittorio's dependence on the family as a whole. Vittorio is strengthened by the fact that the whole family is present. The suggestion is that if only his immediate family had been present, Vittorio would not have felt victorious. The "abnormality" of Vittorio's immediate family would have weakened him.

Colie, Aunt Teresa's suitor, is a successful Italian-Canadian. Because Colie is Canadian-born, the Innocente family feels honoured by his attention. At the same time, the Innocentes cannot believe their good fortune: they feel undeserving of Colie's attention. This is the same reaction that Vittorio has every time a person, Crystal for example, is nice to him. It is that same disesteem which comes with being an immigrant.

For several weeks we went on like that, his visits, our

> suppers, the imperceptible shift to beginning to think of him and my aunt as a couple. It seemed a kind of wonder that things could proceed as simply as they were, that we had only to await now the inevitable conclusion. And yet with each of his visits some apprehension in us appeared to grow larger, as if we could not quite believe our good fortune, couldn't believe this innocence in him wouldn't finally be shattered. (73)

When Colie and Aunt Teresa stop seeing one other for no reason in particular, "It was as if the house itself was rejecting Colie, was slowly turning him out simply because he didn't belong to it" (74). That same element of inferiority, of self-destruction, which repels good fortune within Vittorio is also a trait within the family as a whole. The whole family suffers from the breakup: "In the next weeks we passed through a kind of penance for what had happened . . ." (75).

As discussed earlier (See Chapter 2.), the need to belong is the motivating force behind Vittorio's behaviour and is caused by his inability to negotiate the components of his bicultural identity. This need to belong is further reflected in the narratorial voice through the shift from "I" to "we."

* * * * *

III. *The Lion's Mouth*

The Lion's Mouth is about the creation of an Italian-Canadian identity and the destruction of an Italian one as reflected in the birth of a Canadian city and the decay of an Italian one. The novel is about the wilderness and simplicity of Edmonton and the masks and mazes which define Venice. Bianca's search for truth, which stems from the need to define her identity, inhabits the space between these two cities. In other words, Bianca's rapport with each city establishes a duality that is a part of her cultural and personal make up. Bianca's duality manifests itself in the process of narration and the interspersing of the two narratives, one set in Edmonton and the other in Venice. Her identity emerges from the act of narrating Marco's loss of identity amid a decaying Venice. By narrating the disintegration of her love-objects, Marco and Venice, Bianca is able to refocus her Italianness and acknowledge her Canadianness. The narration of Marco's story is essentially the product of her self-analysis. However, it is the means towards the end result, the creating and the telling of the story, which is important in Bianca's self-definition. The "means" or the "process" which leads to the end result (the subordinate narrative) is given in the six chapters of the main narration. It is here that Bianca's "selves" are presented and interpreted. Through the process of narrating, Bianca sorts out her identity from among the Canadian "wilderness" and the Italian "maze."

The Lion's Mouth is different from the other novels discussed

here in that the main character has three selves: the narrating self, the experiencing self and the created or fictional self. All three are undeniable components of Bianca's identity. The narrating self refers to the Bianca who speaks from the position of the present: the narrator who talks about her writing/narrating and her personal experiences. The experiencing self refers to the Bianca of the past, of whom the narrating self speaks. The created self refers to the Bianca who is fictionalized in the three attempts at a novel and to the one mentioned in passing in the subordinate narrative. The created self plays an important role in the process which leads to the definition of Bianca's identity: this process includes writing/narrating the Biancas that she wanted to be at different stages of her life. In the final attempt at a novel, which is essentially the subordinate narrative of *The Lion's Mouth,* Bianca only figures in passing. For example, Tarquinio receives a collection of The Platters' Greatest Hits from Bianca (41); and she is one of the children playing hide and seek in the mansion. I would suggest that the reason Bianca does not create a major role for herself in the final novel, contrary to the previous three attempts, is because she realizes that she no longer needs to play a role. She has focussed on her true self and therefore no longer needs to create a fictional Bianca to define herself.

The discussion of her created self, however, is simply a stepping stone for a look back at the experiencing self. In the three chapters (9, 13 and 17) which present Bianca's attempts at a novel, the narrator briefly mentions her writing but then reverts to a

specific period in her past. Essentially then, the main narration presents, in a rather mazelike fashion, the process in the creation of and acknowledgement of Bianca's true identity. By the end of the main narration, it is clear that Bianca is rid of her obsessions and has found an equilibrium between her Italianness and Canadianness. Bianca looks back at the past in order to discover/reassess the development of her quest towards finding her true self. This is the goal of her confessional narrative.

Bianca's experiencing self demonstrates that throughout childhood and adolescence, the Italian-Canadian duality inherent in her make up is a source of confusion and frustration for her. The tension is caused by the constant tug from the Italian side – her mother's influence, the summers in Italy – which prevents her from "discovering" her Canadian side. As Bianca says, ". . . my life was split into two seemingly inimical halves, not only between the time before and after [emigration], but through all my growing years: Italy in summer, Canada in winter" (76). She is burdened by the fact that she does not belong anywhere. Even in Italy she feels "wrong" given her inability to find the right words, to have the right look and behaviour.

Bianca's struggle to become Canadian is emphasized by two forces. First, Bianca's mother (who like Nina's in *Infertility Rites* represents Italianness) is a major impediment, according to Bianca, in her attempt to belong: ". . . she was determined that I would remain an Italian child. 'Do you want to be like one of these Canadians?' she would ask rhetorically, which meant, do you want

to be without style, without manners, without sense?" (79). Bianca's mother forces her to wear the clothes sent from Venice, whereas Bianca "longed for ski jackets, jeans, shiny plastic shoes like everyone else" (79). Bianca would rather go to the "tea for two recruit" at school without her mother because, as she puts it, she "felt exposed without the requisite mother" (147). Second, the prejudice and resistance which she is confronted with from Canadians prevents her from fitting in. Bianca is met with laughter and contempt on the schoolbus, in the classroom and on the playground. She remains the outsider despite her efforts to blend in:

> I stood alone on the cold playground. The other girls skipped by the school. I edged toward them. Maybe I could slip in, blend imperceptibly into the *magic circle*. But when I was standing silently beside them, their eyes shifted toward me. Their skipping song shifted smoothly from 'Spanish dancers do the kicks' to 'We don't want no DP's.' *I was an adult before I discovered what the letters stood for. They had categorized me accurately enough.* (my italics, 78)

Bianca's struggle to belong is made difficult from within her Italian circle and from "the Canadians" themselves, so that the pressure from each side influences her sense of self. The passage above shows that as a child Bianca considered "belonging" as something magical and inaccessible. The narrating self comments on the accuracy of the term "DP": in retrospect Bianca acknowledges that she was a "displaced person." She is not angry or resentful of the way she was treated, thereby emphasizing her comfort with her present sense of

self. Although the narrating self remembers childhood as being a difficult experience, she considers it part of the process which has led to the more complete self that she is today.

Bianca's path towards becoming a teller of tales begins in childhood. Her parents work long hours and the family moves from town to town so that Bianca does not have a chance to make friends. As a result of her loneliness and "displacement," she resorts to her creative self, thus becoming a narrator early on. As a child she tells stories to other children (80) and to herself: "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). As Anna Pia De Luca suggests, Bianca's creative world is provoked by her "refusal to accept the duality of her real Canadian world" (475). In fact Loretta, a childhood friend, accuses Bianca of only telling stories about Venice. It is ironic, then, that Bianca's final tale – Marco's story which is set in Venice – is an exercise in the process towards connecting with her Canadian self.

The narrating self acknowledges the influence of two people – Jody and Marco – in the path towards uniting the two components of her identity. Jody, the "perfect Canadian girl" (81), belongs to the "magic circle" and comes from a family that encourages self-affirmation. Bianca remembers Jody's father's words: "It's a good country this. No limits. *You can make yourself.* Country of the future" (my italics, 82). Through Jody, Bianca sees the possibility of defining her own identity rather than creating roles for herself. Jody is the first friend to accept Bianca as she is. In fact, Jody values

Bianca's other(Italian)ness: "With Jody, for the first time, I sensed how the two halves of my life could meet, the mask and the self fuse" (84). Bianca's friendship with Jody is the first of many steps in the path towards defining her true *self*.

Her cousin Marco is the other major influence in her search for identity: Bianca was "nothing more than a blank page" at fifteen when he began to "teach" her about life. He provided her with the "tools" to write the page. Marco is not only an inspiration for Bianca's writing (the subject of her narrating) but also a vehicle (the medium) for her self-expression. The narrating self recalls the summer that she spent "hours upon hours" talking with Marco. And the conversation with Marco continues at another level as the narrating self expresses her gratitude towards the narratee: ". . . you were the first man who attended to me, who let me tell" (75). He encouraged her to think, to contest, to judge for herself ["you must ask, doubt, judge for yourself" (144)]: "It was sound advice and by twenty-two I was grateful for your influence" (145). Marco's influence enables Bianca to grow as an individual and as a "teller of tales," and this in turn allows her to focus on her bicultural identity: "All the seeds . . . you had planted in my mind were watered, nurtured. I finally wanted to come to terms with the country I had been living in" (146). Both Marco and Jody play an important role in Bianca's ability to negotiate the Italian component of her identity with the Canadian reality that she inhabits. Moreover, the act of narrating allows the protagonist to revisit the self of the past (more closely connected to Italy) and the created self; and to follow the

process which leads to the more complete self of the present, that self which has learned to negotiate the Italian and the Canadian components of her identity.

* * * * *

IV. *Fabrizio's Passion*

Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* presents a series of first-person narrators. Fabrizio Notte, the main narrator, narrates 20 of the 25 chapters, one of which is in diary form. The process of narration is shared by secondary narrators who have a close relationship with Fabrizio: Lina (his mother), Guido (his father), Lucia (his sister), Nonna Angiolina (his grandmother), Lea (his lover), and Antigone (his work of art). The element of confusion and disorder which invades the process of narration is in part due to the unannounced switching of narrators throughout the narrative. The reader often wonders *who* is narrating. In the early chapters, for instance, the reader can mistakenly assume that Lina is the main narrator because she narrates Chapters 1 and 3. The reader's recurring uncertainty as to the narrator's identity sets the stage for the main narrator's quest for identity. In other words, the opening chapters provoke the reader to ask the same question that the main narrator will attempt to answer through the process of narration: the question of identity. Throughout the narrative, the reader asks "Who is the narrator?" and the main narrator asks "Who am I?".[1]

i. The Main Narrator

In *Fabrizio's Passion,* as in *The Lion's Mouth,* the main narrator begins by making a conscious statement of his need to establish order. In the concluding paragraph of Chapter 2, which follows his father's letters, the narrating self says the following: "I have chosen to translate the letters he wrote during the month of April 1948 in order to organize what seemed to be, for him at least, a particularly confusing moment in his life" (37). The confusion refers to his father's desire to emigrate which is expressed in the letters and which is referred to in Chapter 1, in the mother's diary. It is from his father's confusion, which is resolved by emigrating to Canada, that Fabrizio's own confusion and search for identity results: born in Montreal of Italian parents, he is raised in a tricultural environment which necessarily leads to questions of identity. The narrating self's attempt at organizing "a confusing moment" in his father's life, is in fact a step in the process towards finding out who Fabrizio is and where he comes from. It is therefore appropriate that the main narrator begin his narration in the chapter entitled "Father's Military Service."

The process of narration reveals a narrating self and an experiencing self torn between three cultures: the Italian, the Quebecois and the English Canadian. The experiencing self in childhood reveals that, within the home, Fabrizio is raised with the customs and traditions that his parents and grandparents brought over from Italy. Outside the home, he attends an English school but

speaks French with his best friend Mario. Thus, Fabrizio straddles three cultures but feels that he does not belong to any one in particular. Equally true, as Antonio D'Alfonso has said of himself in the film *Enigmatico,* Fabrizio speaks three languages but does not master any. Fabrizio's narrating self is constantly translating words and emotions, substituting Italian words for those missing in his English vocabulary, and vice versa. Such a multicultural and multilingual atmosphere results in questions of identity which haunt Fabrizio throughout his adult life, both personally and professionally. The fact that he is not centred but constantly shifting or tugging and pulling at something is evident in his love-hate relationship with Lea and his never ending struggle to produce his film, *Choice.* The two narratorial selves clearly show that Fabrizio has no sense of self: ". . . the essence of his existence is to search for the means that would allow him to grasp the intricate nature of the origin of his identity" (Molnar 110).

Whereas the narrating self seems to be comfortable with his otherness, the experiencing self, particularly in childhood, would like to distance himself from his Italianness. Fabrizio's parents make their children aware that they do not belong here, whereas "the 'others can do what they please because it is their home here" (62). And, if they are to succeed they must compensate for their difference by being better than others: " 'Whatever it is you set out to do you must try to do it better than the others' " (62). From this stems Fabrizio's attraction to the group in power. During childhood Fabrizio attempts to discard his Italianness in order to belong to the

majority: "To be Italian is simply an aberration, something that is outdated, something to be ashamed of" (68). At school, he exchanges his "meatball *panini*" with peanut butter sandwiches from his Quebecois classmates (138). During the summer, he spends time with his godfather's family, a family which has shed its Italianness:

> Every year my parents allow me to spend the summer vacation with my godfather, my father's cousin. That is where I meet three cousins my age. Father is aware of how much I enjoy being with this side of the family, no doubt because they are no longer Italian and have become more Canadian. (67)

Fabrizio's uncle, a "Canadian Notte," is his role-model: "He represents for me that which I want to become. Being Italian, I dream of changing myself into a Canadian. . . . the Canadian is the hero I wish to emulate" (68). Fabrizio's experiencing self believes that "It is by imitating my cousins that I will give myself a better future" (68). The narrating self, however, realizes that this was his "way of running away from a reality which" he "did not fully understand" (68). Thus, the narrating self realizes the negative consequences of denying his roots. His narration is an attempt at redressing that wrong.

ii. The Secondary Narrators

The secondary narrators play an important role in the process of narration not only because, as mentioned above, they contribute

to the element of confusion that characterizes the narrative, but also because they each represent a component of Fabrizio's fragmented identity. In one way or another, each of the secondary narrators has greatly contributed to the shaping of Fabrizio's identity. In fact, I would argue that each of them constitutes a fragment of Fabrizio's identity that sheds some light on Fabrizio Notte. Allowing the secondary narrators to narrate, is a way of illustrating fragments of Fabrizio's identity that he is not yet able to bring together. As discussed above, the fact that his parents narrate the first three chapters of the novel gives an indication of where and who Fabrizio comes from.

This section will discuss four secondary narrators, all of them women: Lucia, Nonna Angiolina, Lea and Antigone. By letting these women narrate, Fabrizio compensates for their voicelessness in their cultural environment. The first two have made a big contribution to Fabrizio's identity from childhood; he is attracted to the latter two because they somehow have experienced the same non-belonging and search for self as he has. Interestingly, Nonna Angiolina speaks through photographs and Antigone through filmscript dialogue. The sections narrated by these four women illustrate Fabrizio's cultural heritage and the role it has played in the formation of his identity.

Chapter 14, entitled "Nightmare" is narrated by Lucia, Fabrizio's sister, to whom he owes "more than words can say" (50). The chapter consists of two specific narrative events: the disturbing relationship of sexual abuse between the paralysed narrator and her

domineering father; the second describes the same abuse by a neighbour. The narration occurs within a dreamlike framework and the narrator constantly asks herself questions which indicate her surprise at being paralyzed: "Why am I in a wheelchair?" (136). Her confinement to the wheelchair is symbolic of the confining Italian culture with respect to women. In fact, I would argue that the objective of this chapter is to illustrate the subordinate position of women in the Italian patriarchical culture. I would further suggest that the uncertainty of the narrator's identity, and specifically the narrator's gender, is an indication of the limitations of the Italian culture within the Canadian reality. In an interview with Jean Royer, D'Alfonso admits that this chapter was written in such a way as to maintain the ambiguity of the "I" (See Royer). Fabrizio demonstrates his sensitivity towards his sister's situation on several occasions. He comments on the fact that Lucia is forced to sleep with Nonna Angiolina:

> A painful period in Lucia's life for, in one day, what used to belong to both of us suddenly becomes mine alone, and whatever sense of intimacy she ever had is lost for good. . . . How then can we minimize the negative effects such a lack of intimacy has had on Lucia? I cannot. (50-1)

He later convinces his parents that he would rather sleep in the basement so that Lucia can have her own room. Fabrizio maintains that he never uses the fact that he is a man as an advantage over his sister: "On the contrary. My guilty conscience forces me to offer Lucia whatever she wants at all costs. And I resort to this brotherly

solicitude whenever necessary" (51). Given Lucia's situation within the Notte family, it is no wonder that she opts to work rather than to continue her education. Her decision to marry Peter Hebert is in part motivated by her need to escape her father's authority. Furthermore, the fact that Peter is Canadian indicates Lucia's desire to escape the Italian culture. Fabrizio laments the condition of young Italian women such as Lucia:

> What fate does an Italian woman born in 1955 truly have? Either she gets through high school to receive her certificate and scrapes up a simple job, with the plan of marrying a man as soon as she can, or she continues her studies at university with only a faint glimmer of hope of ever finding a career-oriented man who will have the patience to wait for her to receive a degree before he can marry her. (145)

This passage demonstrates Fabrizio's sensitivity towards his sister and the decisions that the Italian culture pressures her to make. Lucia's chapter illustrates that a woman raised within the Italian culture has no voice. Through this chapter, Fabrizio gives his sister a voice in an attempt to compensate for the injustice with which the Italian culture treats its women.

Nonna Angiolina is loved and respected, but she does not have a voice in the Notte family. Fabrizio attempts to compensate for her voicelessness by letting her "speak" through the photograph. Given that Nonna Angiolina is illiterate, the photograph is an appropriate medium for her. In Chapter 17, titled "The Couple," Fabrizio plays the role of interpreter as he analyzes a photograph of

his paternal grandparents whose "eyes alone have voices" (156-7). His analysis concentrates on Nonna Angiolina because she is the dominant figure in the photograph: whereas Nonno Nicola "towers patiently, with no desire to speak" (154), Nonna Angiolina's lips reveal "streaks of displeasure, not at all present on the man's lips" (156). Through the photograph, Fabrizio connects with the people he comes from, his Italian origins.

Fabrizio analyzes the photograph as he sits beside his grandmother who has just died of cancer. Even then, her mouth is open "as though she wants to pronounce *Salve*" (157): wanting to speak but unable to. A tiller of the fields in Italy, a factory worker in Canada, Nonna Angiolina can only signal her displeasure (as in the photograph), but she can not interfere in the events of daily life as, for example, when she tries to prevent her son from beating her grandson. She is a major influence in Fabrizio's life, an influence which dates from early childhood given that she has lived with Fabrizio's family since her arrival in Canada. The extent of her influence on and contribution to Fabrizio's identity is evident even after death: he sees her in the street and he speaks to her as to a confidante. In Chapter 19, entitled "Nonna Angiolina," Fabrizio speaks to his grandmother:

> *Cara* Nonna Angiolina, I must write to you in English tonight. As you are very well aware, what choice have I in the matter but to revert to this foreign language if I wish to be understood by the men and women who will read this book. (164)

She represents the Italian component of Fabrizio's identity, the link with the old country.

Hungarian-Canadian Lea, Fabrizio's personal and sexual obsession, narrates Chapter 11. She remains an obsession because she is unattainable for longer than any one sexual encounter. She is first introduced as a passionate and promiscuous 17-year-old who seduces a very naive 16-year-old Fabrizio. The latter falls in love, believing that this is the woman with whom he wants to spend the rest of his life. Lea marries Fabrizio's best friend, Mario, while continuing her affair with Fabrizio. Fabrizio's inability to untangle himself from a relationship which causes him pain, frustration and guilt reflects his confusion and lack of direction. In many ways, Lea is like Fabrizio: she feels lost, trying to find out who she really is, very much aware of the role her cultural heritage plays in the making of her identity. In fact, Lea's narrating sounds a lot like Fabrizio's, as if he were speaking through her. It is not until she says her name that it is clear to the reader that Fabrizio is not the narrator of this chapter:

> My name is Lea, but I am also Antigone. I could be Fabrizio's Nonna Angiolina, or his sister Lucia. I am looking for myself. I am waiting for myself. I am being used and I don't care. Why? (110)

This passage brings together several issues that the narrative attempts to deal with: first, the question of identity, the need to belong, to find oneself; second, the fact that she plays the same role in the formation of Fabrizio's identity as the other women discussed

above; and third, the inferior position held by women within the immigrant culture and in general. Who is using her? Fabrizio? And why does she not care? Because she accepts it as part of her female condition? She represents in many ways the need to belong that Fabrizio experiences with respect to being Canadian and Quebecois. Fabrizio lets her narrate because she represents a component of his fragmented identity.

Antonio D'Alfonso integrates the story of Antigone into *Fabrizio's Passion* in order to emphasize the question of identity. In many ways Antigone's story parallels Fabrizio's: it is about her heritage and about making a statement in order to define her identity. As Judit Molnar writes,

> Antigone and Fabrizio have much in common: both have to be true to their families and to their own selves and aspirations amidst contradictory desires. Both have to come to terms with their own predicament in the process of shaping their identities and living up to the needs it demands of them. (115)

Antigone's story, like Fabrizio's, is a minor story within a larger one: her story cannot be told without telling that of Oedipus. Fabrizio, too, must narrate his roots (parents, grandmother) in an attempt to focus on his identity, to find himself. That is why the novel begins with his mother's and father's script, and why his grandmother is a very important figure in the novel.

Fabrizio identifies with Antigone because he, too, lives the effects of deterritorialization resulting from his parents' emigration.

From this identification stems his need to give a modern representation to the ancient narrative. But for Fabrizio, Antigone is much more than the subject of his filmscript: he lives and breathes Antigone – she is an obssessive passion much like Lea.

Because Antigone is a component of Fabrizio's identity, she is given a "voice" in the process of narration. Like Nonna Angiolina, Antigone does not narrate herself but speaks through the filmscript written by Fabrizio and represented in the process of narration. Part of Fabrizio's search for self involves writing Antigone's story. His obsession with Antigone is his obsession with finding himself, writing/creating his own story:

> If I have decided to make a film on *Antigone*, it is because this film will allow me to cope with my most intimate desires and erase once and for all my fear of appearing ridiculous or of suffering ostracism. (230)

The force of this obsession is such that it invades the process of narration. Given that Antigone, like Nonna Angiolina, is not part of the narratorial present, it is appropriate that she speak through Fabrizio.

The narration of the four women discussed above can be read as components of Fabrizio's identity. Each woman, to varying degrees, plays an important role in answering the question "Who is Fabrizio Notte?" Letting them "speak" is Fabrizio's way of expressing his gratitude towards the women that he is indebted to. Furthermore, this says something about the narrator's sensibility towards the woman's condition in past and present cultures.

Fabrizio's Passion has been criticized for being "all over the place" and for using "une forme éclatée" (See Royer). I would argue that this form is appropriate given that the novel is about a man who is himself "all over the place." The series of narrators and different narrative forms, and the constant shifting between each of these, serves to illustrate what the novel is about: an attempt at constructing the protagonist's fragmented identity.

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V. The "I" Narrator's Reliability

An analysis of the first-person narrator necessarily raises the issue of reliability, and whether the narrator's self-representation can be trusted is of particular importance given that the focus of this study is identity. Can the reader trust Nina DiFiore, Bianca Mazzin, Vittorio Innocente or Fabrizio Notte? Let us not forget that *Infertility Rites* begins with Nina confessing to a lie: she has removed her IUD without telling her husband because she wants a child. And, *The Lion's Mouth* presents Bianca's fourth attempt at representing her *self*: the reader cannot be certain that this is the real Bianca. In *Fabrizio's Passion* questions as to the narrator's reliability arise the first time that Fabrizio narrates, in the first paragraph of Chapter 2 which introduces his father's letters. The narrator informs the reader that he has translated these letters (from Italian into English):

> My translation of these letters probably does not do justice to Father's unintended literary style. I can only hope that the result of my efforts will shed some light on the kind of person that my father was. (19)

The first sentence quoted reveals that these are not Father's original letters given that they have been altered through translation. Moreover, as we read the letters, it is interesting to note that the son-narrator has translated some affectionate terms but left others in the original Italian: some letters are addressed to "Lina *bella*" (21) or "Lina, *amore mio*" (27), others to "Lina, darling" (24) or "Dearest Lina" (24). This raises a number of questions which point to the narrator's reliability. Does he have a reason for not translating some words, or is he simply careless and inconsistent in his translation? The seed of doubt therefore enters into the reader's mind: how can s/he trust the narrator? And, given the discrepancies in Chapter 2, the legitimacy of Chapter 1 is also put into question: have the diary entries been translated from an authentic diary written in Italian or dialect, or has the narrator created them? Thus, early on in the novel, questions about the main narrator's reliability arise.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Vittorio's experiencing self sometimes contradicts the narrating self's statements. And, the acceleration and deceleration of the narrative in *In a Glass House* raises further questions as to the narrator's truthfulness. For example, Vittorio gives us details of his first year in university, but he glosses over the remaining university years, even though this is an important period in his search for self:

> In my next three years at Centennial I felt a slow coalescing in me, *some essence of what I was seeming gradually to distill itself from the mess of all that I'd been. . . .* I began to feel more at home in my aloneness. It was the thing I'd most fought against, most hated, yet also what made me most clearly myself, what I'd always clung to as the last refuge of what I was, and it seemed enough now merely to learn how to carry it with some dignity. . . . There were people whose spheres I passed into for a time . . . though they somehow remained always outside the true flow of my life – what I seemed to need was only the idea of them, the constellation they formed in my mind like a map of familiar territory. And there were a few women as well . . . (my italics, 234)

Why is it that the narrating self accelerates the process of narration precisely at this crucial time? I would argue that the narrating self's objective throughout the narration is to show that he does not belong, and that he is not normal, in order to illicit sympathy from the reader. Therefore, he purposely does not give details of those years during which he has found ways of coping with his sense of nonbelonging.

Moreover, the unexplained appearance of Lassie during the period of normalcy experienced by the Mario Innocente family suggests narrative manipulation: either the interference of the narrating self in the process of narration or of the experiencing self in the narrative events. In the latter case, the narrator is still guilty of not admitting this interference. It seems contrived that the

program they watch is *Lassie* and then a Lassie-like dog appears. I would suggest that Vittorio is responsible for the presence of Lassie in his attempt to render his family television-like. The precedent to this is the mysterious appearance of Rita's blue dress which Vittorio buys secretly.

In first-person narratives, it is important to distinguish between what the narrator says and what her/his actions show. The reader must keep in mind that the narrator may be guilty of narrative manipulation, as in Vittorio's case. In *Fabrizio's Passion* and *The Lion's Mouth,* for example, the very complex nature of the process of narration is an indication that the reader must pay attention to what is being said and what is being shown.

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VI. The Third-Person Narrator

I would like to comment briefly on the use of the third-person narrator in four of the novels under discussion in this thesis. The third-person narrator is used in the subordinate narration of Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* and in Frank Paci's novels *The Italians, Black Madonna* and *The Father.* In Edwards' novel the third-person narrator is appropriate given that it provides the distance between the teller and the told. This distance is necessary because the creator of Marco's story, supposedly Bianca, is geographically distanced from the Italian setting and does not have access to all the facts in the creation of her narrative. In fact, the first-

person narrator in the main narration points to the difficulty of writing Marco's story – the subordinate narration:

> I sit in my book-stuffed study and write. Struggling with words, facts, opinions, the fragments of events that come through the family letters, the phone calls, to find the significant order, the hidden truth. (177)

In the case of Paci's novels, however, I would argue that the third-person narrator allows the narrative to be presented as that of a collective or a community, thus maintaining a distance from the individual. The three novels by Paci discussed in this thesis have been called a trilogy. They present the Italian-Canadian collective, the family within the immigrant community, and the existing duality and conflicts between the old world and the new. From the earlier novel (*The Italians*) to the later one (*The Father*) there is a gradual shift away from the collective and towards the individual, and away from the old country and towards the new. This shift is in part reflected in the perspective adopted by the narrator: in *The Italians* the immigrant, Alberto, and each of his children have a voice; in *Black Madonna* both children have a voice: one speaks for the family whereas the other speaks for herself; in *The Father* only Stephen has a voice. In Paci's writing, the move away from the collective and towards the individual is further evidenced when we consider that Paci's second trilogy – *Black Blood* (1991), *Under the Bridge* (1992) and *Sex and Character* (1993) – is told using a first-person narrator. The second trilogy is about the second generation: it recounts the story of Mark Trecroci from childhood to adulthood.

Thus, Paci's first trilogy is situated between the immigrant and his Canadian-raised children, whereas the second trilogy concentrates on the Canadian children.

Paci's writing, therefore, demonstrates a shift from the narrative identity of the family (collective) to that of the individual. I would suggest that this shift in fiction is reflective of the socio-cultural reality of the Italian-Canadian experience.

* * * * *

Through the act of narrating, each of the protagonists undertakes a journey "home," a process which is necessary to reconnect the elements of their fragmented identity. By telling her/his tale, the narrator aims to establish order in her/his *self*, an uprooted self existing between two realities. The narrator's constant shifting from the past to the present creates a sense of confusion. As each novel illustrates, this confusion is necessary to establish the order which the protagonist craves, to "bridge" her/his identity gap – the gap between her/his "selves," the Italian and the Canadian. The telling of the tale allows a sense of closure which helps define her/his identity.

Chapter Five: The Texture of the Writing

In the previous chapters, I attempted to show that the tension and negotiation which occurs between the Italian component and the Canadian component of the Italian-Canadian identity are represented at the level of the subject matter, narrative structure and narrative perspective. In this chapter, I will discuss how the issue of identity as represented by the Italian and Canadian component is played out in the texture of language interference or the weaving of the words: that is, the tension which occurs when the Italian word invades or breaks the English sentence in the Canadian text.

My analysis of the novels under study has shown that in the quest for identity, prior to a negotiation being reached, the tendency is to embrace the Canadian and to reject the Italian in order to belong to the majority or group in power. The Italian elements surface as an impediment in the quest towards Canadianness. Although the new generation embraces Canadianness through education, friends and lifestyle, the presence of the old country remains through the influence of parents, customs and language. Otherness as represented by the old country can never be completely erased even in the second generation: Fabrizio (*Fabrizio's Passion*) can change his name to Fabi, Nina (*Infertility Rites*) and Marie (*Black Madonna*) can marry English Canadians but their visibly Italian features designate their difference as far as the Canadian majority is concerned. And, even if it were possible to erase all traces of "Italianness," there would still be the self-disesteem and the fear of being "unmasked," that feeling of fakeness which Vittorio (*In a Glass House*) experiences

every day. The Italian component, therefore, is something of a weed which keeps resurfacing.

I would argue that the same occurs at the level of the writing: the tension between "the Italian" and "the Canadian" occurs at the level of words and sentences. There is a parallel between negotiating an identity at the level of the story, at the level of the narration and at the level of the written word. The novels under study are written in English – Canadian English as opposed to American, British or Australian English – in a Canadian context and for a Canadian audience. The Italian word, however, surfaces now and then in different forms thereby breaking the flow of the English-Canadian text. This chapter will analyze the causes and the consequences of langauge interference – the tension arising from the Italian word (or sentence) invading the English-Canadian sentence (or paragraph). The presence of the heritage language which breaks the flow of the English text is what Francesco Loriggio calls "the device of the stone" ("History, Literary history, and Ethnic Literature" 39) or, to use Enoch Padolsky's words, the "linguistic stone" ("Canadian Minority Writing and Acculturation Options" 57). The Italian word within the English text is like a stone or a stumbling block.

In my analysis, I will attempt to answer the following questions: How does the invasion of the Italian word affect the narration and the reading of the text? What does the Italian word contribute to the Canadian text? Does it enhance or disturb the text? Why does the Italian word appear where it does? In other words, I will argue that there is a difference between the Italian

word which has a purpose and the Italian word which merely gives the text an Italian flavour.

* * * * *

I. The Italian Word

The presence of the Italian word always has consequences in the Italian-Candian text, whether they be intended or not. In the novels under study, there is no evidence to suggest that the presence of the Italian word is gratuitous or simply decorative; its mere presence automatically dismisses that possibility. The frequency or the number of Italian words varies in each of the texts under study: whereas in Antonio D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* the Italian word invades the text, at times seeming to take over the narrative, there are relatively few Italian words in Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites*. Does this have a direct correlation to the degree with which otherness is stressed in the novel? I would argue that the degree to which Italian is present has something to do with the level of comfort with Italianness expressed within the novel or, in other words, the level of self-knowledge attained in the quest for identity.

What does the Italian word do to the English-Canadian text? It breaks the English narrative in various ways, each of which entails specific consequences. Italian may take up as little space as a word or as much as a sentence, but in each case there is an effect on the narrative. The presence of Italian is used in different ways by the specific authors in their novels, for different purposes. Nonetheless,

the presence of the Italian word signals certain symptoms of otherness in the quest for identity. My analysis of the novels under study has identified two major reasons for the Italian word "contaminating" the English text: the first is purely to give the text an Italian flavour – to mark *l'italianità* of the writing; the second serves a specific function in illustrating the duality inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity which all of these texts focus on. There is a close connection between the presence of the Italian word and Italianness; that is, otherness as represented by the mother figure who is a major influence. This is particularly visible in *Infertility Rites* and *Black Madonna*. Furthermore, the Italian word is present when there is no appropriate English equivalent: this points to the difference and, in extreme cases, to the incompatibility between the two cultures inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. It is also used for emphasis: to stress the importance of Italianness. Finally, the Italian presence, either as a word on the page or in the nuances of the sentence structure, points to the fact that within the Italian-Canadian reality/identity there exists a constant process of translation.

* * * * *

i. Mother versus Daughter

In Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites,* the Italian word is associated with the mother, the representative of the old country who does not

speak English.[26] The Italian word is usually presented as a metaphor which signals a negative attitude – as in Nina's mother's judgement of her daughter, for instance: ". . . this *zingara* (gypsy) or, worse yet, the *putana* (whore) – mother's interpretation of the North American in me" (12). It is the Italian word that breaks the text which symbolizes the Italian mother's attitude towards her daughter's allegiance to Canadianness. This quotation merits a close analysis given that it combines Italian and English elements both at the level of language and at the level of cultural behaviour/identity. First, it is an interesting, ironical twist that the words which qualify Nina as North American, that is *putana* and *zingara,* are given in Italian. That the mother sees the negative North American characteristics as having "invaded" the makeup/identity of her supposedly Italian daughter is inversely reflected in the quotation above given that it is the Italian words (equivalent to the North American characteristics) which break the English "North American" sentence within the text. I would suggest that Mary Melfi's choice of diction and of language in this quotation was purposely made to illustrate this irony.

Nina remembers the negative Italian words that her mother called her – *putana, zingara, stupida* – but her mother has never actually said "Io ti amo" (42, I love you). Given that these negative words are the few that make up Nina's limited Italian vocabulary, they only serve to make her loath Italianness all the more.

The following passage describes Nina of the past, the teenager

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[26] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the mother figure and her inability to communicate with her children due to the language barrier.

in revolt against the traditional female role as expressed through the notion of "the good Italian girl" that her mother expects her to be:

> I used to believe that I was perfectly equipped to deal with the world by myself. . . . I was prepared to be a revolutionary, a modern woman . . . And I was not going to be lonely because I was destined to become a great artist with an array of lovers, someone who was not going to engage in a middle-class existence or flirt with psychological suicide: the humdrum.
>
> (11-12)

It is this Nina which her mother calls *putana* (whore) and *zingara* (gypsy). These Italian words describe Nina's mother's attitude towards what she considers to be the unrestrained freedom and lack of decorum associated with the new country: these words constitute the mother's condemnation of the "North American" or, more specifically, the English-Canadian within her daughter. It is not only Nina's revolt against the traditional role assigned to the Italian woman, but also her subsequent behaviour during her college years which leads her mother to label her daughter a whore and a gypsy: "While the lovers proved themselves adequate in college, later the change in bodies irritated me, as did the change in scenery: Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver" (12).

According to her mother's interpretation of Nina's behaviour, an interpretation informed by the code of the old country mentality, her daughter is a living definition of the words *putana* and *zingara* given that she sleeps with more than one man and she moves from place to place. What Nina sees as freedom, permitted by the

Canadian openness, her mother sees as debauchery and instability. Thus, seen from different perspectives Nina's past lifestyle is simultaneously a freedom of expression and a cause for ostracism. So too, the interruption caused by the Italian word within the English sentence can be seen as the author's freedom of expression or it can be criticized as creating a barrier within the English text. As Arun Mukherjee writes, "Many 'postcolonial' writers have been criticised for mixing English and their native tongue, the implication being that the untranslated words create a barrier between the reader and the text" (43). In the quotation above (*Infertility Rites* 11-12), however, Melfi provides a translation in parentheses for the Italian words *putana* and *zingara* thereby preventing the accusation of creating a barrier. One could question the necessity of having both the Italian and its translation appear. I would argue that by breaking the English-Canadian text, these Italian words illustrate the need for negotiation between the two cultures, and the impossibility of doing so until a language of mediation has been established. And, the fact that the translation is present is a first step towards such a negotiation. The presence of these specific Italian words causes a rupture within the English-Canadian sentence which symbolizes the inevitable culture shock experienced by the Italian peasant who arrives on the Canadian scene. Clearly, a language of mediation is necessary.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the novels under analysis illustrate a lack of communication between generations: between the parents who retain the Italian customs and their

children who become Canadianized. This is reflected in the conflicts between mother and daughter in *Infertility Rites, Black Madonna* and *The Lion's Mouth,* and between father and son in *The Father, In a Glass House* and *Fabrizio's Passion.* As writer Ven Begamudré indicates, it is a generational conflict heightened by territorial displacement:

> . . . when people bring their children over to another country, they risk losing them because their children change. There's the natural process of rebellion that any generation goes through, but if this new generation is also being influenced by the new society which is trying to assimilate them, then the conflicts within the family become heightened. (Coleman 41)

The lack of communication between the Italian immigrant and the Canadian is not just a question of different languages but also an issue of connotations and mentality. The inevitable distance between Nina and her mother, for instance, is caused by the fact that the former lives a form of transculturalism while the latter refuses to. Begamudré defines transculturalism as "a process of change and of evolution which is necessary among . . . different cultures" (Coleman 36). The process of negotiation lies between the old country and the new. Nina's mother needs to change her old country affiliations and Nina needs to step back a little for, as Begamudré points out, "there's no point in assimilating and becoming completely Canadian, because you'll never become completely Canadian" (Coleman 48).

As indicated above, the Italian words are used in relation to a

former Nina, one whose so-called "Canadian" behaviour was at odds with the Italian component of her*self*. Nina is narrating from a stance where she has been in negotiation with her Italian side and her Canadian side: she now sleeps with one man and she lives in one place. As Nina says, "Something happened to this *zingara* (gypsy) . . ." (12). The presence of negative Italian words placed in a specific position within the narrative is indicative of the progress that Nina has made towards her sense of self. On the other hand, the fact that Nina grew up being called *putana, zingara* and *stupida* (29) did little for her self-esteem. Due to the verbal abuse from her mother Nina shies away from the Italian within her; and the more Canadian she becomes, the more her mother abuses her verbally. Nina sees her mother and her mother tongue as something negative, and therefore chooses to detach herself from both. Furthermore, the fact that the presence of the Italian word is limited to negative terms which describe Nina's Canadianness as seen from her mother's Italian perspective reflects Nina's difficulty with her mother tongue and her need to detach herself from the culture that the mother represents. This also reflects the old dichotomy associated with women: if Nina is not "a good Italian girl" like cousin Dora, then she is a whore.

* * * * *

The negotiation between the Italian word and the English text which is described above as symbolizing a need for negotiation

between the mother and the daughter, the Italian and the Canadian, also occurs in Frank Paci's *The Italians* and *Black Madonna*. The latter novel in particular is similar to *Infertility Rites* in this respect. In fact, the strained rapport between Marie Barone and her mother, Assunta, is nearly identical to that of Nina and her mother. This tension is reflected in the weaving of the words through the presence of the Italian language. The Italian word, again as in *Infertility Rites*, is symbolic of the old country as represented by Assunta in her attitude towards her Canadian daughter. Throughout the novel, Marie is called (or remembers being called) *stupida, ingrata, ignoranta* and *pazza* – words which her mother uses to demonstrate her frustration towards a daughter who steers away from the Italian culture and embraces the Canadian one. The following passage refers to the event in Chapter 2 during which Marie refuses to go to mass with her mother:

> "You're such a weight on me, Marietta. I don't know what to do with you. You're such a shame and a disgrace . . ."
>
> And on she went. *Vergogna* this and *disgrazia* that. She couldn't believe a daughter of hers would ever stop going to church. It was an unpardonable sin. What were they teaching her at that public school? She'd have to speak to Adamo to send her to the girls' Catholic school. *Mannaggia America* to have produced a daughter like her. (28)

The incident is important on different counts. First, Marie shuns religion because it is associated with the old country. Her mother's reaction is to refer to Marie as a "shame " and a "disgrace." Ironically,

however, in the dialogue these words are given in English even though Assunta speaks them in Italian. It is in Marie's response to her mother's reaction that the words are given in Italian. "*Vergogna* this and *disgrazia* that" denotes Marie's tone which ridicules her mother's words. These words break the English sentence thereby signalling the tension existing at the level of the story between the mother and the daughter, between the Italian and the Canadian. Furthermore, "*Mannaggia America*" (damn America) emphasizes Assunta's exasperation with the new land, holding it responsible for the way her daughter has turned out. That the Italian words equivalent to "damn America" break the English sentence is very significant for the presence of the Italian word refers back to the sacrifices inherent in having moved to the new land. For instance, when Marie as a teenager goes on a diet to lose weight, her mother interprets this as ungratefulness towards her sacrifices, a rebuke of what she gave up in leaving Italy in order to give her children a better life:

> *Mangia* this and that, she'd say. *Non è bastanza*. . . . Marie you haven't eaten enough. . . . And when Marie started her diet, . . . she was immediately accused of being *pazza*, crazy. . . . If she wasn't crazy she must be ill then. . . . Or she had been influenced by the English and their stupid eating habits. Or she was doing it merely out of spite to hurt her mother. Yes, that had to be it, she went on in dialect. Her poor mother didn't slave away in the kitchen to be treated so shabbily. Her own daughter, an *ingrata*—ungrateful for all they had done for her.

> Adamo didn't go to work to put food on the table so that it would be left uneaten. (32)

In this passage the presence of the Italian words shows the tension which exists between the Italian and the Canadian culture as played out in the issue of food: "*Mangia*" (eat), "*Non è bastanza*" (It isn't enough). Marie feels the pressure from her Italian mother who measures a person's wellbeing and sanity by her/his food intake. If one does not eat then s/he must be crazy, hence the word "*pazza*" (crazy) ascribed to Marie who is on a diet.

The tension here is a cultural one: Assunta and the Italians of her generation come from a time and place (postwar Italy) where food is scarce. That Assunta suffered from hunger is evidenced in the photograph that Marie finds in her mother's trunk. Assunta's generation left Italy so that they could live a better life, and that includes having enough food. The concept of a diet, therefore, is unheard of: it is shocking to Assunta that her daughter does not eat. Behaviour such as Marie's, which Assunta is not equipped to understand, is automatically considered the influence of the new country and therefore condemned for affecting the family. Losing weight is part of Marie's struggle to find herself and to like herself. Marie eventually gives up her diet because she is unable to resist her mother's interference. As a result, the conflict between Marie's personal need and her mother's pressure to eat will aggravate itself into a psychological illness (anorexia) which is symbolic of the hatred she feels for her Italian roots.

I would argue that the word *ingrata* is the core of the passage

cited above. Assunta judges Marie's behaviour to be an expression of ungratefulness: for Assunta's confinement to the kitchen, for Adamo slaving away at a job that he doesn't particularly like, for their emigration – all of these sacrifices are met with ungratefulness. The Italian word *ingrata* ties all of these elements together, causing tension within the English passage which is equivalent to condemning Canadianness for influencing an Italian daughter. What it comes down to is that Marie's behaviour, and specifically her ungratefulness, is caused by the ways of the new land. The presence of the Italian word causes a tension within the passage which is symbolic of the tension lived on a daily basis within the Barone family: the tension caused by two different cultures grating at each other, rather than negotiating a side-by-side existence. Assunta's anger comes out in the words related above in indirect speech and nuanced by Marie's mocking tone: Marie "laughs" at her mother's condemnation of the Canadian way and, in so doing, asks the reader to become her ally.

Part of the process towards finding her own identity involves coming to terms with the mother who represents the Italian within her. For Marie, Assunta Barone is "A person whom she had always been at odds with" (116). Nina (*Infertility Rites*) sees her mother as someone who criticizes her, never encourages her, for whom someone else's daughter is always better. And Bianca (*The Lion's Mouth*) feels that she does not have the "requisite mother" (147), one who puts down Canadianness and insists that her daughter remain Venetian. But as Marie's father puts it so well: "no matter what you

are, what you become, Maria, she had you in her belly. How can you fight the blood in you, *ignoranta*!" (116). In these novels – *Infertility Rites, Black Madonna* and, to a lesser extent, *The Lion's Mouth* – the relationship between mother and daughter is crucial: it illustrates the differences and conflicts between the old country and the new which are inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. The mother represents the Italian heritage – its customs, language and culture; the daughter represents Canadianness; and the tension between these polar opposites is reflective of the on-going battle within the daughter's self. All three characters – Nina, Marie and Bianca – need to negotiate a ground in which they can let the newfound Canadian self exist while acknowledging that the mother, and all that she represents, is also part of their identity. It is through the presence of the Italian word – the mother tongue – within the texture of the writing that the tension and the need for conciliation is illustrated.

* * * * *

ii. Wife versus Husband

In *The Italians*, the tension between the Italian and the Canadian surfaces with the presence of the Italian word in the relationship between Lorianna and her husband, Lorenzo. During their engagement period, Lorianna uses the English word to protect herself against Lorenzo's Italian ways; she explains to him that things are done differently in the new country. Her sense of superiority

linked to her mastery of the English language and her knowledge of the Canadian way is destroyed on the wedding night. Lorenzo indicates his power by refusing to speak English and by forcing Italian on her just as he forces himself on her physically. The incident escalates from the gentleness implied in "*Ma, parla italiano, carissima*" (Speak Italian, dearest) to " '*Sta' zitta, inglese!* I will teach you some Italian you never forget' " (17; Shut up, English!). The tension in the second quote is made evident in the juxtaposition of the Italian sentence and the English one. The Italian sentence precedes the English sentence, but it is the strength of the command which overpowers the English (even though the Italian words take up less space) and reflects Lorenzo's power over Lorianna in this instance. In the sentence "*Sta' zitta, inglese*!" (Shut up, English!), both the words and the tone shock Lorianna into silence. The English sentence loses strength by the mere fact that it is in English, but it has the same threatening tone. It is debatable whether Lorenzo spoke these words in English or Italian, nonetheless the fact that the words are given in English softens the harshness of the Italian words which precede. The tension exists between the two sentences (put side by side to show the conflict between Italian and English) but also within each sentence given that "*inglese*" (English) is a component of the Italian sentence and "Italian" is part of the English sentence.

The tension between the Italian and the Canadian made so evident on the wedding night, both as far as action is concerned and in the weaving of the words, has important effects on Lorianna's sense of self. She realizes that she will have to negotiate the Italian

and the Canadian components not just within her own identity but also within her marriage. Prior to the wedding night Lorianna had power over Lorenzo because she spoke the language of the new country and was comfortable with its customs; however, the intimacy inherent in a married couple (as opposed to the rapport between a couple who is engaged) is such that her power in the outside world is worthless in the home: "Now that he had control over her there was no telling what he would do" (21). Thus, language is used to illustrate the power struggle between the Italian and the Canadian as reflected in gender roles within the Italian home. There is no question that now Lorianna must follow Lorenzo, and that she must learn to negotiate her space within the relationship. This is revealed the following day as they drive on the highway towards Montreal. She yieldingly asks, "*Vuoi parlare italiano*?" (21; Do you want to speak Italian?). It is significant that this is not translated, for it shows Lorianna's decision to submit to Lorenzo and therefore to Italian. His response is also significant: "No, it doesn't matter now. As long as you know it. Living in this country is not easy for me" (21). The fact that it doesn't matter now can be interpreted in several ways: it is no longer relevant because she has understood him, that is, he has mastered her; or it doesn't matter because when they are out (in Canadian society or driving across the expanses of the land) he wants to speak English, but at home he wants to speak Italian. This is confirmed by the fact that that very evening he again overpowers her physically. It is thus established that evenings they "speak Italian" (and all that this entails). When Lorianna tries to

explain that things are different in the new country, he responds: "'In my bedroom they are not the difference. Everything is the same'" (22). Lorenzo refuses to acknowledge that everything is *not* the same: Lorianna as the "Canadian" is different from Lorenzo, the Italian. Lorenzo's words indicate his resistance to being seen as different from Lorianna and "different" within Canadian society: he wants control over the majority in power (as represented by Lorianna) if only in his bedroom. It is an ironic twist then that his words are given in English: if they are spoken in English, then he is contradicting himself; if they are spoken in Italian, then it is the author's way of indicating the existing tension and irony within the Italian-Canadian reality.

Lorianna must negotiate the Italian and the Canadian within herself and within her marriage as well as in her rapport with her parents. As a result of this awakening, Lorianna undergoes a period of anti-Italianness during which she seldom visits her parents and refuses to speak Italian with them. This unusual behaviour results in her father labelling her *ingrata*: her father wants to know "what was so wrong that she was being *ingrata* in front of her mother" (25). Being called an "*ingrata*" is quite an insult given that "gratitude" is a very crucial element for the immigrant family. Gratitude is what the immigrant expects of his dependents for the hardships endured and the "sacrifice" of having abandoned the mother country in order to give them more opportunity and a better life. The Italian word breaks the English sentence to show the severity of Lorianna's behaviour. And it also shows the digression that she has taken in

her search for self, in denying the Italian component of her identity. Lorianna senses that her situation with Lorenzo is punishment for having turned her back on the old country.

* * * * *

II. The Irreplaceable Italian Word

As discussed above, the Italian word is often used to break the English text, thereby pointing to the tension existing between the Italian culture and the Canadian world in which the characters must constantly negotiate a space for their identity. The Italian word, however, is also used to signify something specifically Italian (such as *scopa* – the Italian card game, or *tarantella* – the dance, in *Fabrizio's Passion*), for which the English equivalent is not available or does not do justice to the Italian object and its connotations. Such Italian words or phrases include *la busta, lasagna in brodo, maccheroni alla chitarra, polpi, polenta, calle* and *vaporetto*. Of course, some of these words pertain to food, thereby pointing to the importance of food in the Italian identity. In *Black Madonna,* Marie Barone cannot tolerate the food her mother makes, and later any kind of food, because she associates it with the confining element of the Barone household and the Italian culture. Food, then, is an undeniable component of the Italian identity, one which Marie attempts to eliminate by starving herself.

In *Fabrizio's Passion,* the term *lasagna in brodo* invades

Chapter 11 from which the title is derived. The word "lasagna," it is true, has been accepted into the English language as well as other languages, but *lasagna in brodo* captures the nuances that the English equivalent (lasagna in broth) does not. Lea, Fabrizio's non-Italian lover, is quick to point this out: " 'How is it possible? You can't serve lasagna in a soup!' " (110). To which Fabrizio responds with a lengthy explanation describing the steps in making this specialty, the principal dish from his parents' hometown. *Lasagna in brodo,* then, not only breaks the English sentence, but the chapter as well given that the core section comprises Fabrizio's explanation and that the chapter title is "Lasagna in brodo." The presence of the Italian words in *lasagna in brodo* call up the atmosphere (including taste and smell) of Mrs. Notte's kitchen on special occasions, as well as the image of the small town in Italy. Thus, *lasagna in brodo* as an entity and as an Italian expression is an undeniable part of the Italian culture and therefore of the Italian identity. *Fabrizio's Passion* is about a young Italian-Canadian's struggle to bring his identity into focus, the process of which includes a meandering path towards the acknowledgement of his tricultural makeup. The Italian specialty discussed above is a component of his heritage and as such is particularly important in the narrative because it reaches back to the core of Fabrizio's roots.

The same is also true of *maccheroni alla chitarra* which appears in *The Father*: "In the Abruzzi, his father said, they called macaroni *maccheroni alla chitarra* because when it was made it was run through guitar strings" (44). *Maccheroni alla chitarra* recalls

Oreste's Italy, an Italy which he is constantly yearning for to the detriment of the Canadian reality. Moreover, it is significant that Oreste be the one to say this given that in the Mancuso family, the father is the one who represents Italy and who wants to instill a strong sense of the Italian heritage in his sons. The same is true of *polpi*:

> He brought up a bowl of dark grapes and set them on the table beside the *polpi*, a dish of fish stewed in large quantities of oil and red peppers. Oreste had taught Maddalena to make it. In the old country they had only used squid, his father said, but since it wasn't easy to come by in the Sault any fish had to do. The dish was so strong that no-one else in the family could eat it. A fresh loaf from the bakery rested beside his favourite dish. (63-64)

In this passage, the word *polpi* breaks the English language and the Canadian culture by highlighting the Italian one. *Polpi* refers to Oreste's favourite dish, something from the old country that he will not give up like making his own bread and wine. In this scene the bread was made by Oreste in his bakery, and he has just finished making wine. The word *polpi* also points to the tension between the members of the family: namely Oreste who represents the ways of the old country, and Maddalena and Stefano who want to become Canadianized. It is significant, then, that no one besides Oreste can eat the *polpi* because it is too strong, signifying "too old country." The rejection of the *polpi* by the rest of the family is symbolically a rejection of Oreste and of the old country.

In *The Italians*, the narrator (Alberto's perspective) comments on Giulia's tendency to prepare too much food:

> To judge from the meal's size, she still hadn't got over the years in the old country when they had been forced to eat *polenta* almost every day. They had scarcely seen meat then, so they had had to substitute corn-meal and bread for it. (74)

The word *polenta* disrupts the English passage in two ways. First, the mere presence of the Italian word causes tension within the first sentence quoted above. In contrast, that tension is not present in the second sentence where the word "corn-meal" replaces *polenta*. Second, the word *polenta* causes a shift in setting, from the overabundant Christmas meal that Giulia has prepared in the present to the poverty experienced in Italy of the past. Thus, the presence of the Italian word results in the juxtaposition of the Italian setting and the Canadian one, thereby pointing to the fact that the Italian past, in this case the poverty which caused a diet of cornmeal and bread, is an undeniable component of the Italian-Canadian identity. In other words, the Italian past is responsible for the behaviour of the present, in this case Giulia's fear of regression.

The inclusion of specific Italian words in *The Lion's Mouth* also takes the reader back to the Italian setting. In the subordinate narrative (Marco's story), Caterina Edwards uses nouns (such as *fondamento, vaporetto* and *calle*) that are specific to the Venetian setting:

> Seeing the floating station for the *vaporetto* before him, Marco realized he had been going in the wrong direction . . . (21)

> Stopping at the top of a bridge and gazing down at the twisting *calle*, he saw the last of the evening crowd; . . . He began running, pushing his way down the calle, then turning off down a narrow, empty *fondamento* (30). He broke into a slight run. *Calle*. Bridge. One more – the last narrow street was blocked off. (37)

In this passage the Italian words which describe Marco's Venice cause the reader to experience the Italian component of the novel. The *vaporetto* is a common means of transportation in the water city. An English equivalent such as "boat" or "little steamer" could have been included, but no English word could do justice to the image created by the word *vaporetto*. Similarly, the word *calle* could be replaced by "narrow street," as in the last sentence quoted above. The *calle*, however, is one of Venice's specific attributes. In fact, *The Collins Concise Italian-English Dictionary* gives the meaning for *calle* as "narrow street (in Venice)." The *fondamento* refers to the platform or quay at the edge of the water – where manmade construction meets one of the natural elements, water. The *fondamento* represents stability, a product of man's rationality, whereas water represents nature's uncontrollability and unpredictability – as in the recurring Venetian floods, one of which is described in Edwards' novel.

The presence of Italian words in the above passage, as in the novel itself, which are very specific to the city of Venice creates an image of the setting inhabited by Marco, a setting which is at the root of Bianca's quest for identity. Venice – the *calle*, the *vaporetto*, 'the

water – is an ineffaceable component of Bianca's identity as well as Marco's. The passage quoted above reflects Marco's unstable and precarious situation: his lack of direction, psychological and physical (given that "he had been going in the wrong direction"), and his sense of panic are indications of his impending nervous breakdown. The words italicized in the above passage are simultaneously associated with motion – the constant motion, therefore instability – and the maze which qualifies Marco's psychological state. The author has chosen these specific Italian words to create a detailed image of the Italian water city and to illustrate the vulnerability of an individual's identity.

In the last chapter of *Fabrizio's Passion*, the narrator takes the time to explain the connotations of the *busta* which is an integral part of Lucia's wedding as of many Italian weddings:

> Peter is tripping over Lucia, their hands encumbered by white envelopes handed to them by the guests after the handshakes. Those famous Italian envelopes.
>
> *La busta*. How to describe this seemingly simple object intrinsically linked to Italian-American weddings? This tiny white envelope seals what consideration or dislike one family holds for another. Unabashfully displayed on that banal wedding card, the newly-weds can read what others think of them in the privacy of their homes. Each envelope is a potential time bomb. It can celebrate a friendship or insinuate a subtle disenchantment. All confessed, yet nothing ever

> openly spelled out – one family's unbreakable loyalty to you as well as another's hypocrisy. (226-7)

The *busta,* a characteristic of the Italian wedding in Canada, holds nuances and connotations that the "envelope" does not. What the narrator does not spell out is that the *busta* is the carrier of a monetary amount given to the newlyweds as a gift. It is the specific amount of money contained in the envelope which "can celebrate a friendship or insinuate a subtle disenchantment." The word *busta* in the above passage is more then a simple envelope, it is a symbol of the traditional Italian-Canadian wedding. It brings together the friends and relatives from the old country in the setting of the new country.

The word *paesano,* or *paesani* in the plural, which appears in several instances in the novels has several connotations. In Italian a *paesano* is a person who is from the same town, or nearby town in Italy. For instance, in commenting on his first weeks in Mersea the narrator of *In a Glass House* points to "the strange half-familiar faces of the *paesani* who came to visit" (3). Here, the word *paesani* refers to people originally from Valle del Sole, Vittorio's hometown, or from neighbouring towns. For the Italian living abroad, such as the Italian-Canadian, the word *paesano* has taken on a broader meaning to refer to Italians of the same region. And, in regions outside of Italy inhabited by few Italians, *paesano* refers to Italians in general. This meaning of *paesano* has also been adopted by non-Italians to show kinship or goodwill, be it sincere or not. It is sometimes used to make fun of the Italian as well. Mario Innocente (*In a Glass House*)

comments on the non-Italian's use of the word *paesano* in the passage below:

> "Mario," he [the German] said. "Mario, Mario, *como stai, paesano*?" . . .
>
> "That was the guy I bought the farm from," he [Mario] said. "Those Germans – *paesano* this, *paesano* that, everyone's a *paesano*. But the old bastard just wanted to make sure I don't forget to pay him." (31)

The passage shows the Italian's mistrust of non-Italians who try to ingratiate themselves by relying on the inherent friendship implied in the word *paesano*. Although Mario Innocente is not fooled by this, his young son Vittorio is lured into a false sense of friendship by the bullies on the school bus:

> "*Italiano*," I [Vittorio] said, clutching at the familiar word.
>
> "Ah, Italiano!" He thumped a hand on his chest. "*Me speak Italiano mucho mucho. Me paesano.*"
>
> When the other boys got on the bus and came to the back, the black-haired boy said they were *paesani* as well, and each in turn smiled broadly at me and shook my hand. (49)

Vittorio soon discovers that the pretended friendship is simply a way of making fun of him.

The word *paesano*, then, brings together the Italian and the non-Italian, be it positive or negative, sincere or not. For the Italian-Canadian, the word creates a link between the new country and Italy by defining and uniting those of the same origin; at the same time

the word allows the non-Italian, or the Canadian, to enter into the Italian culture albeit under false pretense. The word *paesano* brings together the two components of the Italian-Canadian identity in uniting the true sense of the word with the meaning adopted by non-Italians.

* * * * *

III. The Italian Word and Its English Translation

This section will discuss the presence of the Italian word and the inclusion or omission of its translation. Whether the translation of the Italian word is given or not has certain implications and consequences of accessibility for the reader of the Italian-Canadian text. The presence of the translation more so than the presence of the Italian word establishes a specific rapport between the author and the reader.

The author's choice to include the translation of an Italian word or sentence renders the text accessible to the reader who does not read Italian. It therefore establishes a certain openness – the will to reach beyond a minority audience. On the other hand, the absence of the translation renders inaccessible certain sections of the novel to readers who do not read Italian. In this case, the author risks alienating the non-Italian speaking reader, thereby establishing a certain degree of elitism for the novel. Arun Mukherjee distinguishes between the two by labelling the reader a "cultural insider" or a "cultural outsider" (44). Of course, in certain instances

in which the Italian word appears without the translation the meaning is not lost for the non-Italian reader. In other cases, the translation is necessary to understand the allusion made and the nuances of the action. In *The Italians*, for instance, it is necessary for the reader to know the meaning of the words "*ero ubriaco*" (20; I was drunk) in order to understand the reason Lorenzo gives for raping his wife. Another such instance occurs in *The Lion's Mouth*: "'*Stasera mi butto.*' The silly pop song they had danced to so unrestrainedly the summer before the wedding played itself over and over in his [Marco's] mind" (30). The allusion to the pop song follows Marco's reflections on his marital problems. He remembers Paola's anger towards him immediately after the wedding ceremony, evidence that their relationship was rocky from the beginning. The reference to the pop song has a number of implications that the reader who does not speak Italian will miss. The English equivalent of "*Stasera mi butto*" is "I abandon myself tonight." The meaning is very important because it refers to Marco's status in his marriage: by marrying Paola – a wealthy but overly demanding and domineering wife, whom he does not love – Marco abandons himself, loses his own identity. At the same time, the reference to the song foreshadows Marco's one night stand: Marco abandons himself to Elena that same night (*stasera*), thereby unknowingly entangling himself in a terrorist plot. The consequences of his abandonment are many: it is the equivalent of throwing away his marriage, his good name, his reputation and his *self* (given the nervous breakdown which results).

The presence of the Italian word, and more so of its translation, establishes from the start the kind of author-reader rapport that dominates the text. The presence/absence of the translation, then, determines the audience being addressed. In making the decision (not) to include the translation, the writer creates an identity for her/his reader and reveals who s/he writes for. Whether or not the author includes the translation does not take away from the fact that the process of translating is an undeniable step in writing for the Italian-Canadian author. Joseph Pivato makes this point in *Echo*:

> Independently of the language or languages the Italian writer uses, he or she is always translating. It often seems that the translating process becomes more important than the distant Italian reality that it may be evoking. Ethnic minority writers share the advantage of having translated reality from one context to another all their lives. Italian-Canadian writers take this activity further through the use of a second language in their work. (125)

Translation is a way of bringing together the two worlds which make up the Italian-Canadian identity. The narrator in *The Lion's Mouth* is very conscious of the activity of translating inherent in the process of narration. In Edwards' novel, the Prologue sets the ground for the complexity of the presence of Italian words, and their English equivalent: Bianca is simultaneously reading her aunt's letter written in Italian and translating it into English:

'Bianca, *se sapessi, se sapessi*', if you knew, if you knew, '*Que*

> [sic, *Che*] *disgrazia di Dio.'* God's disgrace? I must be translating incorrectly, a disgrace from God. 'Barbara *scossa.'* Barbara has been shocked? hit? shaken? . . . 'Worse, Marco (you, you) suffered a nervous breakdown.' *Esaurimento nervoso,* the words translated literally as an exhaustion of the nerves. (9-10)

This passage illustrates the interplay between levels of the text and the complications resulting from the presence of Italian as well as the negotiation involved between "the Italian" and "the Canadian" components of the narrator's Italian-Canadian identity. An important question arises: whom is the narrator translating for? Given that the narratee is Marco, her Italian cousin who does not speak English, the translation must be for the reader's benefit thereby making her/him a "cultural insider." Or perhaps, the narrator is translating for her own benefit: to ascertain that she understands the written Italian word she feels compelled to find the English equivalent. This illustrates the constant need to bring together the two components of her identity in an attempt to better understand/define herself. The narrator points to the importance of the translation process necessary when the Italian word, in this case her aunt's letter, enters her own Canadian context. The narrator takes her role as translator very seriously in finding the appropriate word, which testifies to the notion that the Italian-Canadian lives in a state of constant translating.

The narrator in *Fabrizio's Passion* shares the same attention to detail in the act of translating: "When I finish the pasta, *faccio la*

scarpetta. (Literally, this translates as 'to wet one's shoe', that is, to soak a piece of bread in the tomato sauce, and wipe clean one's plate!)" (65). In all of the examples above, the act of translating is an attempt to unite the two worlds which comprise the narrator's identity, that of the Italian-Canadian. This is done in two simultaneous ways: first, by stating in Italian that which has its origin in the Italian world (the aunt's letter; the way one cleans the plate with bread); and second, by giving the English equivalent so that the non-Italian reader, rather than feel alienated, feels connected to that Italian world being described.

In the novels under study, it is often in dialogue that the Italian word negotiates its position within the English text. This is particularly true of dialogue between members of the Italian-Canadian family. In these novels, dialogue is the meeting ground for the first generation and the second; it is where the representatives (parents and children) of two worlds, two cultures and two languages negotiate their territory and work out the details of their undefined identity. Given this specific context, it is inevitable that the Italian word and its English translation invade the dialogue.

The presence of the Italian word and its translation is particularly visible in dialogue in the novels by Frank Paci. In *The Father*, for instance, Oreste Mancuso attempts to instill in his son the importance of the work one does as well as whom it is done for:

> 'Where I come from . . . the most important people next to your family are your *amici*, your friends in the community. Without them there is no reason to bake bread. I couldn't

> make bread just for strangers. You gotta care about what you do, Stefano. You can't care for the bread if you bake for *i stranieri,* strangers.' (60)

In this passage the words *amici* and *stranieri* are polar opposites in literal and symbolic meanings. The word *amici* refers to other Italians whereas *stranieri* refers to non-Italians or Canadians. The two Italian words stand out in the English passage: why are they given in Italian and why is the translation included? I would argue that Oreste's words, although they are represented in English here, were actually spoken in Italian. The two Italian words sum up that which is at the core of Oreste's identity and philosophy of life: he is all-giving to friends, those who share his origins, but he is unapproachable to Canadians. This is in keeping with his inability to embrace Canadianness, his rejection of the Canadian setting and his constant yearning for Italy. In the same vein later in the novel, it is by using the Italian language that Oreste and his friend Amelio criticize and ridicule Maddalena, the now Canadianized employer and successful businesswoman:

> "*Credere, obbedire, combattere,*" Oreste cried out. "Believe, obey, fight."
>
> "*Mussolini ha sempre ragione,*" Amelio said.
>
> "You mean the manager is always right," Oreste corrected him.
>
> They laughed and drank, apparently straight from the bottle. (88)

In the passage above, Maddalena is seen as the enemy by Oreste and

Amelio. She is compared to the dictator Mussolini. The presence of the Italian words, like drinking wine on the job, constitutes a revolt towards the Canadianness that Maddalena represents.

The translation of the Italian word is usually given in dialogue which is supposedly spoken in Italian but represented in English in the text, as in the passages quoted above from *The Father*. Such is also the case of dialogue in the subordinate narrative (Marco's story) in *The Lion's Mouth* as well as Vittorio's interviews of Italians in Chapter 25 of *In a Glass House*.

As mentioned above, the inclusion of the translation of the Italian word is a positive element from the perspective of the non-Italian reader. On the other hand, the Italian word followed by its translation has an annoyingly repetitive effect for the bilingual reader. This is evident in passages quoted above as well as in the following from *Fabrizio's Passion*: "*Ho conosciuto un uomo che firmava il suo nome con un X.* Yes, I knew a man who signed his name with an X" (79). The redundancy is apparent here to the Italian speaking reader. It seems that the text "babies" the reader, that he is somehow taken by the hand. Furthermore, it interrupts the reading and slows down the process of narration.

* * * * *

IV. The Stilted Sentence

In the section above, the discussion focussed on the Italian word for which there is no equivalent or for which the English

translation does not do justice to the Italian. This section will concentrate on the stilted sentence: the English sentence which sounds Italian – a sentence which has a latinate structure as opposed to an anglosaxon or germanic structure. Several of the novels under study provide examples which show how the tension existing between the Italian and the Canadian is rooted as deeply as the structure of the sentence: something which is virtually beneath the texture of the writing, perhaps even unbeknownst to the writer. This is further proof of the subversive nature of Italian-Canadian writing.

First, it is important to stress that the stilted sentence is different from the literal translation. In *Infertility Rites,* for instance, Nina is asked "When are you going to buy your baby?" (11) which is a direct translation from the Italian idiom meaning "when will you have a baby." This is a literal translation purposely used to maintain the Italian flavour, that is to indicate that the words were spoken in Italian. The same is true of the following: "I pour myself another cup of American coffee – what mother calls 'coloured water' "(137). The expression "coloured water" is a direct translation for the Italian cliché on American coffee. In *The Lion's Mouth,* Bianca reads in her aunt's letter that her cousin Marco has had "an exhaustion of the nerves" – the literal translation of *esaurimento nervoso* meaning a nervous breakdown (10). In all of these examples, the objective is not to sound English but to transmit the Italian idiom into English words without remaining faithful to the nuances of each language. This is usually done to indicate that the words are originally spoken in Italian.

In the stilted sentence, on the other hand, the Italian is not present as words but at the level of the sentence structure,[27] a characteristic which has been criticized as badly written English, or simply bad writing. I would suggest, instead, that the presence of latinate structures within the Italian-Canadian novel represents, to use Pasquale Verdicchio's words, "the utterances of immigrant culture" ("Subalterns Abroad" 214) and mirrors the reality of the Italian-Canadian experience.

The following exchange from *In a Glass House* occurs between Mario (Vittorio's father) and an acquaintance encountered at a local bar. The subject of their conversation is the fear of not having or making enough money:

> "*Si*, fifty cents," my father said, still talking into his coffee though his energy seemed drawn to the men now. "It took half a day to make that, when I came here – "
>
> "Oh, always the same story! *Dai*, sit down, you'll be a rich man soon, when the cheques start coming in from the farm."
>
> "The farm, at least what I made before I could put in my pocket. Now I'm just working for the bank. And then that damned German, still worried about the four cents I owe him – " (32)

The subject of the conversation is a major preoccupation of the immigrant, whose objective in coming to the new land is to

[27] I wish to emphasize that I am analyzing the stilted or latinate sentence as opposed to latinate vocabulary. It would be interesting to do an analysis of the latter, particularly in dialogue, but that is a much longer and complex undertaking.

improve his living conditions and therefore revolves around money. The dialogue above is the English rendition of what was said in Italian or in dialect. The sentences are constructed in such a way as to reveal the Italian beneath the English. This is visible in "Oh, always the same story!" where the subject is missing as it would be in an Italian sentence. The last three lines spoken by Mario are particularly latinate. This is indicated by the following: the pause after "The farm" which is followed by a new thought (in the same sentence) expressed using a non-English structure (". . . at least what I made before I could put in my pocket."); the pause (comma) instead of the verb in "And then that damned German, still worried about the four cents I owe him – ". And, within these sentences there are also literal translations from the Italian ("in my pocket" and "the four cents"). Thus, the content of the passage as well as the Italian or non-English sentence structure reflect the identity of the first generation Italian-Canadian: what is said and how it is said.

The following passage from *Black Madonna* illustrates the latinate structure present in a conversation between Assunta and Marie, who represent polar opposites of the Italian-Canadian duality:

> "Ma, I'm going to Toronto," Marie said abruptly. "They . . ." She couldn't find the Italian word for "accepted". [sic] "They took me." . . .
>
> "Ma, I have to go. More times I go to school, better job."
>
> "You tell to your father . . . These things, I don't understand . . . You go to school—good. You smart—good. But you crazy. Your head in the clouds. The older you get, the

> crazier you get. I don't understand you. To *Toronto* you want to go?" (70-1)

In order to communicate with her mother, Marie is forced to speak like her. Although Marie's "More times I go to school, better job" is not correct English, the structure is correct in Italian. Likewise, Assunta's "These things, I don't understand." and "To *Toronto* you want to go?" (where the (in)direct object precedes the verb) have an Italian structure. The sentence "You tell to your father," on the other hand, is a direct translation of the Italian. Moreover, the subject of their conversation consists of the "push and pull" characteristic of the old way versus the new way: the traditional Italian mother does not want her daughter to leave home, whereas Marie wants to experience the freedom of the Canadian way.

In *Fabrizio's Passion*, Fabrizio uses an Italian sentence structure when he says "I am fourteen years old but am thirty in my head" (72). This does not work grammatically in English but is often used in Italian. Likewise, in *The Lion's Mouth*: "But where have you been? . . . We waited an hour, but since you didn't have the courtesy to even phone . . ." (37-38); and "So loud you have to have that record?" (42) have an Italian sentence structure. Such a structure is appropriate here given that the sentences are spoken by an Italian, Marco's mother. Bianca, too, is guilty of using the latinate sentence structure: "Her bedroom, that evening I visited, was sparse, cell-like" (116). The following passage appears at the end of the novel, in the Epilogue:

> This week, Barbara arrived and I must play the wise aunt with

> a trunkful of distractions. Poor child — as I write she is standing in the living room, staring out the window at the still leafless trees and mud-filled garden, *wondering what place is this. . . . So I begin again my life in this city, this land.*
> (my italics, 178)

Even though narrating her tale has given Bianca a clear focus on both components of her cultural makeup, the stiltedness of the italicized words emphasize the influence of Bianca's Italian heritage. It is also significant that the first phrase, "wondering what place is this," refers to Barbara, the Italian girl visiting from Venice, taking in the novelty and difference of western Canada.

The examples quoted above illustrate that the presence of Italian in the Italian-Canadian novel is not solely due to the presence of the Italian word: Italian invades the English text by causing chaos at the level of the sentence structure.

* * * * *

V. The Absence of Italian

The presence of Italian words, or lack thereof, is directly linked to the way in which the narrated exposes the Italian element. Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* is an interesting example of how the lack of Italian says something about Nina's own attitude towards her bicultural identity. As mentioned above, Italian has a negative connotation in Melfi's novel and is present mostly in connection to

Nina's mother. The little use of Italian in this narrative reflects Nina's longtime quest to distance herself from her Italianness. Nina's relationship with Daniel is itself a bicultural element combining the Italian and the Canadian. As the narrative progresses their relationship moves from being totally "English" where Nina denies her Italianness, to one which emphasizes the Italian-Canadian duality when Nina reconnects with her roots through her desire to experience motherhood. Daniel does not hesitate to show his disapproval and dislike for Nina's surfacing Italianness: "When I married you, you were an exemplary Wasp. . . . It's recently you started to act like an Italian fishwife" (32).

The fact that this narrative has few Italian words reflects the rapport of power-subordination between Daniel and Nina: the English, Daniel, subordinates the Italian, Nina. Interestingly, Daniel uses Italian to treat his wife like a child or to reach conciliation. The following passage is about Daniel's refusal to have a child until he has published his book and gotten tenure:

> [Nina] "You'll take a loan to hunt down bushmen, but you won't have a baby with me because it's too expensive. Talk about priorities."
>
> Upset, I start to cry . . .
>
> "Nina," Daniel pronounces my name with affection. If and when I get tenure I'll reconsider."
>
> It is an offer of reconciliation.
>
> [Nina] "It's impossible to get tenure. The university is cutting back on staff. You know it."

> [Daniel] "If I can manage to finish my book and get it published, then I might have a better chance at it. *Si?*"
>
> The geisha girl smiles, calculating just how much her benevolent master-in-training has sacrificed to please her. (9-10)

This exchange illustrates the couple's relationship of dominance-subordination, where Nina sees herself as a "geisha girl," subservient to her husband. The conversation shows Nina to be much like a child, whom the parent must appease when she does not get what she wants. Daniel is affectionate because he wants to calm her down. His use of the Italian affirmative *Si* in question form (which in this case means "right?") illustrates the power and the control which he has over his wife. It is similar to the candy that the parent offers the child to make her feel better. And, it is Daniel's use of *Si* which appeases Nina, while making her feel dependent and inferior. Thus, the English-Canadian husband who has revealed his negative attitude towards Nina's Italianness elsewhere, now uses her heritage language to win her over. The same is also true of a second instance which occurs later in the narrative:

> [Daniel] "Look at yourself: you're an emotional wreck. I won't have it anymore. I care too much about you to see you waste yourself away pining for a baby. It's not necessary. *Capisci?*"
>
> *Capisci*: Wop jargon. Literal translation: "Do you understand?" In this context it actually means: "Or else." (151-2)

Again, Daniel's use of an Italian word shows his dominance over

Nina. In this case, it is the equivalent of "a shaking" to bring the child under control. Therefore, in the first instance submission is attained through affection and in the second through force.

The absence of Italian is also noticeable in Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House*, particularly in those sections of the novel which narrate a situation or an event which is removed from the Italian cultural component of Vittorio's identity, that is his family and the Italian community in Mersea. This is the case when Vittorio visits his sister Rita at the Amhersts' and while he is away at university.

In Paci's *The Italians* the presence/absence of Italian is directly related to the character from whose perspective the chapter is narrated: there is little, if any, Italian in the chapters narrated from Bill's perspective compared to those narrated from the perspective of Lorianna, Aldo and Alberto. Canadian-born Bill is less connected to and less affected by the Italian component of the family's bicultural identity whereas Lorianna and Aldo remember Italy and therefore feel more connected to their Italian background.

* * * * *

VI. Dialogue

Given the presence of more than one language in each of the novels under study, it is not surprising that the process of translation undertaken by the author/reader/narrator has a definite mark in the narratives. The question of the language originally used for a passage

comes up frequently. In *Fabrizio's Passion*, for instance, the diary entries (written by Fabrizio's mother) in Chapter 1 and the letters (written by Fabrizio's father) in Chapter 2 are in English even though we know that they are supposed to be read keeping in mind that they were written in Italian. The fact that the letters are framed by Italian words – *bella, amore, con tanto amore,* – signals the process of translation.

Due to its dual setting, Venice and Edmonton, and dual time frame *The Lion's Mouth* is a good example of the complications and negotiations which occur between the Italian and Canadian components at the level of the written word. The dialogue in the subordinate narrative set in Italy deserves some consideration given that the same process is used; that is, English dialogue dotted with Italian words, as in the main narrative set in Canada. When dialogue is read in the subordinate narrative, however, the reader must keep in mind that it is actually spoken in Italian. Therefore the Italian words are not contaminating the English, it is rather the opposite. As we read Marco's English words, for instance, we know that he speaks them in Italian. The presence of the Italian word in the subordinate narrative is actually the original spoken word left as such: the Italian word is actually in its proper place; the English word is the intruder.

In Chapter 13, Marco takes Bianca to see Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* performed in Italian. Bianca is so excited that she is unable to finish dinner: " 'Shakespeare? That would be too wonderful. We're going to be studying that play next year in

school'" (113). Her excitement, however, is mostly due to the fact that she is going out with her cousin for the evening for the first time ["I had never been out with you in the evening" (113)], for as she puts it: "Shakespeare . . . in Italian. Oh well. I guess I can't have everything" (113). This incident combines the two integral components of her identity: the Shakespearean play is certainly part of her "English" culture, especially given her avidity for reading, and it is presented in Italian. What Caterina Edwards has done here is to illustrate once again the process of translation inherent in a bicultural and bilingual identity. Edwards makes this evident immediately at the beginning of the novel with the letter which arrives from Italy. Bianca reads the Italian letter and simultaneously translates it for herself, if only to better understand it. In bringing the Italian word together with the English, during the process of Bianca's translation, this early in the novel, the author is clearly indicating the importance of this issue in the narrative. Translating from one idiom to the other is a characteristic of Bianca's identity which begins in childhood and lasts throughout her life.

* * * * *

As the analysis in this chapter shows, the Italian component of the Italian-Canadian identity manifests itself in the diction and sentence structure: the Italian appears within the weaving of the words on the page. The presence of the heritage language within the "ethnic text" has led to accusations of bad writing. And, the use of

the stilted sentence, as discussed above, may be perceived as the writer's inability to master the English language. On the contrary, as I have argued in this chapter, these "ethnic markers" or "linguistic stones" are devices purposely used by the writer to illustrate the tension and negotiation at work in the bicultural identity. As Pasquale Verdicchio argues,

> By stressing latinate vocabulary, by the insertion of Italian syntactical forms, and by the inclusion of linguistic elements that represent the utterances of immigrant culture, these [Italian-Canadian] writers have altered the semantic field of English, thereby denying expected meaning. ("Subalterns Abroad" 214)

The fact that the Italian word interrupts the flow of the English text is a way of illustrating the symptoms of otherness which are an undeniable characteristic of the Italian-Canadian reality. Furthermore, the presence of the Italian word within the English text should not be interpreted as a barrier between the two (Italian and Canadian) cultures. Rather, the meshing of Italian words with English words should be seen as the negotiation necessary in order to bring the two cultures together. By using the "device of the stone," the Italian-Canadian writer attempts to illustrate the continuous transfer from one culture/language to the other experienced by the Italian-Canadian individual. This is further illustrated through the process of translation ingrained within the text, whether it be visible (as in Bianca translating her aunt's letter) or beneath the surface (as in Marie attempting to speak like her mother).

Thus, the presence of the Italian word within the novels under study does not disturb the text but rather enhances it. The Italian word is purposely woven within the English sentence to illustrate once again, as was done at the level of the narrated, the narration and the narrator, the duality of the Italian-Canadian identity.

Conclusion

The question of identity is key within both Canadian society and Canadian literature. By writing about their specific bicultural experience and that of their ancestors, hyphenated-Canadian writers are simultaneously valorizing the immigrant experience and contributing to the shaping of the Canadian identity. Through fiction, the Italian-Canadian writer gives her/his community an identity and a specific space within the Canadian mosaic. As Linda Hutcheon writes, "The multiracial and multiethnic nature of this country is made real to us – is written into our consciousness of what it means to be Canadian – by Canadian writers" (5).

The Italian-Canadian literary corpus traces its development alongside the growing Italian-Canadian community. "As the community has grown from tiny isolated and inward looking 'encampments' to a large, widespread and resourceful entity, so too have its writers become more outspoken and more visible" (Salvatore 35). The last decade in particular has seen numerous publications, especially a growing number of novels. Some Italian-Canadian writers, such as Mary Melfi, Antonio D'Alfonso and Mary di Michele, have turned from poetry, if only temporarily, to the novel.

The novel provides a "full-length" medium for depicting the quest for identity, a process which involves a reevaluation of the Italian-Canadian's origins. The novels discussed in this thesis clearly emphasize the duality of the Italian-Canadian experience and the different ways of approaching it. Whereas the older generation is, for the most part, firmly rooted to the customs and values of the old

country, their children, caught in a "cultural schizophrenia," reject the old in favour of the new. The duality experienced by the Italian-Canadian causes conflict within the familial sphere and an identity crisis within the individual.

In the novels analyzed, characters look towards the past – childhood, the parents' experience as immigrants, and the influence of the old country on the family – in order to better understand the present. It is this process which then leads to a more complete understanding of the self. If the protagonist is not able to answer the question "Who am I?" by the end of the narrative, s/he has at least come to the realization that it is by reconnecting with her/his Italian heritage that s/he will find "home." Bianca Mazzin (*The Lion's Mouth*) does find home: she has a clear sense of who and what she is by the end of her narration. In fact, it is suggested that her self-knowledge was such before the narration began and that the narration is simply a reaffirmation of the process which led to self-knowledge. By contrast, by the end of his narration, Vittorio Innocente (*In a Glass House*) still has quite some distance to cover in his search for self. Of all the characters discussed, he is the furthest from defining his identity. Vittorio does reconnect with his Italian heritage, to some extent, by interviewing Italian immigrants. However, he only barely begins to do so with his father before the latter's death. He has not been able to negotiate the components of his bicultural identity, and his journey to Africa although it brings up images of Italy, is something of an escape from having to do so. Most of the protagonists presented in the novels discussed fall somewhere

between Bianca Mazzin and Vittorio Innocente in their search for self. At the end of the narrative both Marie and Joey Barone (*Black Madonna*) have focussed on reconnecting with their Italian heritage even though it is impossible to make amends with their parents who have passed on. This is indicated by the fact that Joey works with his father's tools, and by Marie's decision to visit her mother's village. Stephen Mancuso (*The Father*), too, realizes the importance of his father's values, values deeply rooted in the family and in the old country: in the last scene of the novel Stephen bakes three breads with his own hands, just as his father had taught him, one for each of his family members. Nina DiFiore (*Infertility Rites*) comes to the realization that a child is not the solution to her identity crisis, but that she must focus on her identity before she has a child. And, Lorianna Gaetano (*The Italians*), the middle child who is caught between the influence of the old world and the new, realizes that her identity is rooted in the family but that she, as an individual, is neither completely Canadian nor completely Italian.

It is in the process that leads to a better understanding of the self – the quest for identity – that the Italian-Canadian duality is exposed, acknowledged and negotiated. This is clearly illustrated at the level of the story – the narrated – and reinforced at the level of the narration. Except for Nino Ricci's *In a Glass House* and Mary Melfi's *Infertility Rites* which have a linear narration, the narration in the texts examined unfolds at multiple levels.

In *The Italians*, for instance, the four levels of narration which continuously interrupt one another are shared by the father, who

represents the old country; Bill the Canadian-born son who represents the new country; and Lorianna and Aldo, Italian-born but Canadian-raised who represent the duality of the two countries/cultures. The process of narration in this novel reflects the family's struggle between the old and the new and the attempt to negotiate a middle ground. In fact, the way the narration unfolds emphasizes the identity of the family as opposed to that of the individual. The narration which occurs from the perspective of the father represents the Italian heritage, whereas that of the children illustrates varying degrees of acculturation: Aldo is linked to the old world given his affinity for the church; Bill is the Canadian child; and Lorianna is the one who constantly oscillates between Italianness and Canadianness. It is when the father's narration stops that the children prove that they are able to negotiate the needs of the family and those of the individual, or those of the Italian and the Canadian.

In *Black Madonna*, the narration moves intermittently from the present to the past, from Joey's perspective to Marie's. Joey's narration can be interpreted as that of the Barone family given that he gives up his personal dreams in order to please his parents. *The Father*, too, presents a narration which begins and ends with the present, but the crux of the narrative is presented through flashback. In these two novels the flashback narration can be interpreted as the journey towards the past, a journey whose goal is to explain the present. It is through the flashback narration that the main characters come to reappropriate their Italianness which leads to a better understanding of the self.

In Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* the narration moves back and forth between Bianca's story set in Canada and Marco's set in Italy, thereby emphasizing the ambiguity and the opposing forces within the Italian-Canadian identity, and specifically the protagonist's "two seemingly inimical halves" (76).

Likewise, the disorderly narration of *Fabrizio's Passion* which does not respect chronology or temporality highlights the state of confusion which characterizes the protagonist's existence. The process of narration in Antonio D'Alfonso's novel is particularly complex given that it is a multivoiced narrative told through various genres but with no sense of order.

The levels of narration and the pattern established by the process of narration function to illustrate the duality and confusion inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. Thus, the process of the telling – the sequence used in telling the events as well as from whose perspective they are told – plays an important role in the question of identity as represented in the novels under study. The process of narration reflects the duality and the tension inherent in the Italian-Canadian identity. Each of the novels analysed in this thesis, in its own way, illustrates the quest for identity through the telling of the tale.

In the first-person narratives discussed – *Infertility Rites, In a Glass House, The Lion's Mouth and Fabrizio's Passion* – the duality of the Italian-Canadian is illustrated through the narrator's self in turmoil. The narrator's life experience has been influenced by two distinct and often conflicting cultures, that of the Italian home and

that of Canadian society. The Italian influence leaves its mark in childhood and adolescence, and the Canadian influence conteracts the Italian one as the adolescent becomes an adult. As a result, the narrator's present reality consists of a disturbed self, unable to harmonize the different influences and facets of her/his existence. Each narrative is about the narrator's reevaluation of the self; and it is through the act of narrating that s/he attempts to put order in her/his life. The narrating of her/his life necessarily involves a constant shifting from events of the past to those of the present, thereby creating different layers of narration and different narratorial voices. The movement from past to present is guided by the two narratorial selves: the narrating self of the present and the experiencing self of the past. The recurring shift from one time/setting to another is reflective of the internal struggle and negotiation within the narrator's self.

The fact that the narrating self recalls the experiencing self's behaviour during specific incidents of the past, leads to an element of uncertainty as to the accuracy of the events remembered. The authenticity of the narrating self's narration is necessarily biased by the passing of time and personal prejudice given that each of the first-person narrators discussed reveals a certain dislike for the experiencing self of the past. Consequently, the narrator's reliability is questioned at different times during the narration, even though s/he may not do it intentionally.

The process of narration is undertaken by the narrator in an attempt to establish some sense of order between the recollections of

the past and the reality of the present; and ideally this should lead to appeasing the *self* in turmoil. The confusion resulting from this undertaking is a necessary step which leads to bridging the gap between the two components of the narrator's self, the Italian and the Canadian.

Another element discussed in this thesis, the clash of languages which occurs in the texts, points to the cultural multiplicity of "ethnic minority writing." Language is, in fact, one of the elements which causes friction between the two cultures exposed in the narratives. The question of identity is played out in the weaving of the words: the tension arising between the components of a bicultural identity, in this case the Italian-Canadian, is illustrated in the novels when the Italian breaks the flow of the English sentence. The presence of the "heritage" language within the "ethnic text" is a device used by the writer to illustrate the tension and negotiation at work in the bicultural identity. The interweaving of the heritage language with the language of the majority in the adopted country should be interpreted as an attempt to bring the two cultures together.

* * * * *

The search for self, the struggle to define oneself, is a common preoccupation of any individual, but this is particularly true of Canadians given the many heritage cultures which are contributing to the Canadian identity. The texts examined in this thesis do not

only illustrate the duality of the Italian-Canadian, they also point to the multiplicity of Canadian culture. The Canadian individual whose heritage is partly other lives a particularly complex reality, especially that person who is the child of immigrants. It is true that the immigrant generation endures the difficulties of finding a space within a land which is foreign in customs and in language. However, the immigrant herself/himself has made a conscious decision to move from her/his homeland to a foreign country, knowing full well that difficulties would be encountered. The child of immigrants, on the other hand, is in a particularly precarious position given that s/he has no choice but to experience the effects of her/his parents' deterritorialization.

Although the novels discussed illustrate one component of the Canadian mosaic, they indicate the continuous transfer from one culture and language to the other experienced by the bicultural individual. This is further illustrated through the process of translation ingrained within the text, whether it be visible or beneath the surface. Through their fiction Italian-Canadian writers suggest that in order to come to terms with the element of "schizophrenia" inherent in a bicultural identity, the individual must undertake the process of reevaluating the heritage culture. Only then will s/he reach "home" and attain a better understanding of herself/himself.

The contribution of Italian-Canadian literature, and of ethnic minority literature in general, to the shaping and understanding of Canadian culture and the Canadian mosaic is undeniable. Canadian "ethnic minority writing" as opposed to "ethnic majority writing," to

recall Padolsky's distinction, plays a major role in promoting the existence and valorization of ethnicity. What Frank Paci says of Italian-Canadian writing is also true of all ethnic writing: "The revolutionary aspect of the writing . . . is that the author is giving these people a voice for the first time, and creating a language for them, and with them" (Hutcheon and Richmond 234). The ethnic minority writer has something valid to say: not only does s/he give validity and a voice to her/his culturally specific community, s/he also plays an important role in shedding some light on the complexity of the Canadian identity. The fact that this writing is not considered mainstream is not the fault of the writers, but "of the readers, mostly those who aren't ready to concede their mainstream ethnic biases . . . to 'marginal' ethnic cultures" (Hutcheon and Richmond 233).

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