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CONSTANTLY TRANSLATING: THE CHALLENGE FOR ITALIAN-CANADIAN WRITERS

> "He did not know at what point he had become Mike. One day looking for a suitable translation of his name and finding none, he decided that Mike was closest. By the end of the summer, he was Mario at home and Mike in the streets."
>
> C.D. Minni

CANADIAN LITERATURE can no longer be viewed in a nationalistic sense as a single entity with unifying themes. The various ethnic voices in Canadian writing make us realize that we should refer to this writing as the literatures of Canada rather than Canadian literature. Nowhere is this more apparent than in translation, not just literary transcription from one code to another, but the transporting of ethnic values and issues from one milieu to a vaster one – Canada. This brief examination of Italian-Canadian writing demonstrates that the ethnic writer is constantly involved with the processes of translation, processes that highlight the ambivalence of ethnicity in Canada.[1]

The long history of translation in Canadian writing usually involved movement from. French to English; from Charles G. D. Roberts' rendition of Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's *Les anciens Canadiens* in 1890 to the many translations of Shiela Fishman in the 1980s. Now, however, there are other dimensions of translation we have to take into account if we are adequately to appreciate the growth of modern immigrant writing and its contribution to Canadian culture. Despite this history, English literary criticism has always been suspicious of translation. To counter this anglocentric attitude, D.G. Jones argues, in 'Grounds for Translation,' that we must look at this act as more than just a curious verbal exercise.[2] In Canada translation is the transformation of regional and ethnic values from one social context into another. Within the dynamics of a national culture that is coming into being, immigration and translation have altered our view of the natural communications processes in Canada. No longer can we think only of a bicultural context; rather, we must be aware of the degree to which translation as a social process involves the inclusion of diverse ethnic values that will bring about further changes. As C.D. Minni's short stories indicate, translation can take many forms. Mario, the little Italian boy in 'Details from the Canadian Mosaic,' finds that he can live with the ambivalent duality of double names and double identities, in both Italian and

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[1] E.D. Blodgett, 'Fictions of Ethnicity in Prairie Writing,' *Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures* (Downsview: ECW Press 1982) 85-111.

[2] *Ellipse* 21 (1977) 58-91.

English.[3] For Minni and other Italian-Canadian writers – Maria Ardizzi, Marco Micone, Frank Paci and Filippo Savatore – translation is both a measure and an instrument of social and cultural change.

In literary works by Italian-Canadians, as well as other ethnic writers, the degree of sharing that results from linguistic and cultural translations alters the nature of the experience that is represented. This examination of the *raison d'être* of translation may also help us to understand the linguistic and cultural concerns of English and French writers. The existence and the widespread reading of *Bonheur d'occasion*, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* and *Kamouraska* in both French and English versions affect the cultural milieu of both Francophones and Anglophones.[4] Michel Tremblay, as a separatist playwright, used to refuse to speak English, but now entertains and enlightens thousands of Anglophones by reading his works in English translation on radio and television. The growing recognition and acceptance of immigrant writing is also having an influence on our perception of ourselves as Canadians.

Frederick Philip Grove is a famous example of the transmutation of an immigrant identity: the abandonment of his European life and the creation of an entirely new persona as a rural Canadian author. Anthony W. Riley and others are only now beginning to examine the effect of Grove's European literary career on his Canadian novels.[5] For other writers the immigrant perspective has yet to be considered. With his 1914 novel, *Maria Chapdelaine*, Louis Hémon captured the piety of rural Québec through the eyes of a French newcomer. Hémon's transposition from one social context into another was a personal act of translation. His popular book was later conveyed into English by both Andrew McPhail and W.H. Blake. Movement across linguistic and national barriers continued with *Maria Chapdelaine* as the first Canadian novel to reach a wide international market through foreign language translations. Still another French immigrant, Georges Bugnet, chronicled the hardships of Parisian homesteaders in the northern Alberta bush in *La Forêt* (1935). The idealistic settlers, Roger and Louise, attempted to transfer European culture to a new continent, and to transplant sophisticated urban society to the remote backwoods of the west. The English version, *The Forest*, continued the process of carrying over the ideas and values of one social setting into another. In these and other Canadian novels – Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Kreisel's *The Rich Man*, Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* and Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* – North American society is examined from an immigrant perspective that involves a close reassessment of both foreign and Canadian values.

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[3] In *Other Selves: A Collection of Short Stories* (Montreal: Guernica Editions 1985) 56.

[4] E.D. Blodgett, 'How Do you Say "Gabrielle Roy?",' *Translation in Canadian Literature*, ed. Camille La Bossière (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1983) 13-34.

[5] 'The Case of Grove/Greve: The European Roots of a Canadian Writer,' *The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-Speaking Canadians*, ed. W.E. Riedel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1984), 37-58. See also Walter Pache, 'Der Fall Grove – Vorleben und Nachleben des Schriftstellers Felix Paul Greve,' *Deutschkanadisches jahrbuch* 5 (Toronto 1979) 121-36, and E.D. Blodgett, 'Alias Grove: Variations in Disguise,' *Configuration*, 112-53.

Italian-Canadian writers share many affinities with the above-mentioned authors, but they also demonstrate several differences. Louis Hémon and Georges Bugnet were able to continue to write in French; on the other hand, Grove and Kreisel consciously chose to write in English rather than German. Whichever choice they made, it is apparent that all four were attempting to move closer to what they perceived to be the mainstream of North American culture. Italian-Canadian writers seem more conscious of the problems that these cultural and language choices entail, and are less willing to give up their background. 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 writers have the advantage of having transposed 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. Unwilling to abandon their Italian background, they draw it into the Canadian sphere of consciousness by using the Italian language. Many write in English and Italian or French and Italian; others have their work translated into the second language. In Montreal, Antonio D'Alfonso has encouraged this linguistic diversity through his trilingual publishing house, Guernica Editions.

Preoccupied with the problems and forms of translation, Italian-Canadian writers working in English, in French and in Italian (and for some a combination) are demonstrating that Canadian literature exists in various languages. The diverse linguistic environments are connected by several forms of translation: verbal, cultural, historical, geographical and spiritual. In verbal translation a work written in one language is transposed into another in order to reach a wider audience. Immigrants achieve cultural transfer when they bring over aspects of their native customs and adapt them to the North American context. Some Italian-Canadian historians have attempted to rewrite episodes of Canadian history in order to make them over and reclaim them for Italian society.[6] Travel back and forth between Italy and Canada has brought geography into the transformation process as writers re-establish or maintain ties with Italy.[7] Beyond these concrete acts of translation immigrant writers often explore the spiritual process of transformation involving personality, identity and a sense of belonging.

Poet Mary di Michele explains her experience of translation as a result of her first return trip to Italy:

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[6] Guglielmo Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (Montreal: Chiesa Italiana di N.S. Della Difesa 1956). Camillo Menchini, *Giovanni Caboto scopritore del Canada* (Montreal: Edizioni Riviera 1974) and C. Menchini, *Francesco Bressani, Primo missionario italiano in Canada* (Montreal: Edizioni Insieme 1980). Robert F. Harney, *Italians in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario 1978), uses the term filio-pietism to describe ethnic histories that deal only with the great figures of the past.

[7] For many Italian-Canadian writers a return trip to Italy has acted as a catalyst for their work. See the Preface by Giorgio Di Cicco in *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Hounslow Press 1978) 9, and Joseph Pivato, 'The Return journey in Italian-Canadian Literature,' *Canadian Literature* No. 106 (Fall 1985) 169-76.

> I made only one trip back in 1972. I spent the summer there with my whole family. Because of my very intense and detailed childhood memories my body remembered things that I did not consciously remember. When we were in my mother's village I asked my mother about things that had changed and she would say, "How can you remember that?" …At times I feel confused about my identity. I grew up in Canada but my 1972 trip brought out this confusion. My Italian identity started to come out more and more. By the end of the summer I started to dream in Italian.[8]

In Mary di Michele's dream the rational Canadian mind meets the emotional Italian soul. In *Mimosa and other Poems* (1981), di Michele tries to capture this translation experience that moves across the verbal, geographical, and historical forms to reach the spiritual. The illusive movement from one context into another can only be suggested by verbal translation or by bilingual editions of works. By means of dual language collections Romano Perticarini, Filippo Salvatore, Tonino Caticchio and Caroline Di Giovanni are deliberately bridging the gap between different language and cultural groups, and are challenging the unilingual approach to Canadian writing. Romano Perticarini of Vancouver chose to bring out both his collections of poems in Italian-English editions. Perticarini, though a Canadian, published extensively in Italy and has won several poetry awards there. *Quelli della fiondal The Sling-Shot Kids* consists of elegies and meditations on the immigrant experience in Canada which the poet directs primarily at the North American reader.[9] With *Il mio quaderno di Novembre*, Perticarini continues this sharing of his experiences with both an Italian language and an English language audience.[10] In Montreal, Tonino Caticchio edited *La poesia italiana nel Quebec*, an Italian-French collection of verse by some twenty-four writers.[11] The contradiction in these collections is that as the two languages are drawn together on facing pages; we see the differences in forms of expression, in idioms, points of view and values.

Perticarini illustrates the concern of these writers with 'looking for a suitable translation' of their work. Three of his poems exist in two English versions. 'Emigrante,' 'Bella Vancouver,' and 'Ricchezza di un sogno' have one transcription in *Quelli della fionda* and a different one in Di Giovanni's anthology, *Italian Canadian Voices*.[12] It seems that the editors and Perticarini were not satisfied with the

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[8] 'An immigrant daughter and a female writer: Mary Di Michele interviewed,' *Vice Versa, Magazine Transculturel* 1,v-vi (juin-juillet 1984) 21.

[9] (Vancouver: Azzi Publishing 1981)

[10] (Vancouver: Scala Publishing 1983)

[11] (Montréal: Centre de Culture Populaire Italien 1983)

[12] Caroline M. Di Giovanni, ed., *Italian Canadian Voices: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (1946-1983) (Oakville: Mosaic Press 1984) 177-83, See also Fulvio Caccia and Antonio D'Alfonso, eds., *Quêtes : Textes d'auteurs italo-québécois* (Montréal: Éditions Guernica 1984).

first version and so they asked Antonino Mazza to produce another translation for the anthology.

In many cases the complex process of translation reveals the existence of other barriers, both visible and invisible: walls, the separation of time, social restrictions, cultural differences, psychological problems and personal prejudices. An early example of a work that attempts to transcend barriers is Mario Duliani's *La Ville sans femmes*, an autobiographical novel based on the author's experiences in internment camps during the war.[13] A journalist for *La Presse*, Duliani had several motives for publishing his French book so soon after the war. Duliani wanted to chronicle for the outside world the dehumanizing effects of life in the camps, to explain the suffering created by this war measure, and to go on record as a loyal Canadian. The Italian-born author and playwright attempts to break through his isolation in the camps and to communicate once again to the larger society. Though a permanent resident in Québec, Duhani later extended the act of reaching out by publishing an Italian version, *Citta senza donne* (1946), meant as a further justification to Italian-Canadians and Italians of their treatment in this country during the war. As a piece of persuasive journalism the work fails; despite the author's apparent propaganda intentions, *La Ville sans femmes* succeeds in revealing an ugly side of the home front.

> La privation de ma liberté, l'éloignement de ma famille, la perte de mon temps et de mon argent, tout cela, je l'accepte sans rien dire. Ce qui m'humilie profondément, c'est l'idée que ma femme, une Canadienne, et mes fils, qui sont canadiens, puissent me soupçonner d'avoir trahi notre pays. (p. 53)

'Notre pays' is Canada. Immediately after the dangers of the war it is necessary for Duliani to state reassuring, patriotic reasons for the book. Behind the façade of expressed intentions Duliani lets the personal point of view and the language express his real feelings of sadness to the reader. The language barrier kept the author's views from reaching the rest of Canada, since the book never appeared in an English translation: a volume which would not have been well received in the decade following 1945.

A more ambitious bilingual publishing project is Maria Ardizzi's novel, *Made in Italy*, which appeared simultaneously in both Italian and English editions.[14] While Ardizzi's effort straddles the gap between English and Italian, the narrative itself deals with the communication breakdown in an immigrant family. The heroine, Nora Moratti, is a woman who has been toughened by the hardships of dislocation. In the course of her life in Canada she buries her husband and two sons. Even before these

[13] (Montréal: Société des éditions Pascal 1945). The back cover of my copy advertises Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*. *Citta senza Donne* (Montreal: Gustave D'Errico 1946) is the Italian edition.
[14] (Toronto: Toma Publishing 1982). This is the publisher for both the Italian and English editions.

premature deaths Nora finds herself isolated from other people. Ardizzi skillfully uses the language barrier, marriage disintegration, the generation gap, physical paralysis and death as metaphors for the loss of communication. At one point Nora is rendered speechless by her fear of speaking English:

> The children, in a few months, had aIready learned to express themselves in English. Soon, they would not understand me anymore. Even Vanni inserted obscure words in our dialect, words for which, because of my pride, I asked no explanation. With the neighbours, during our rare meetings, I expressed myself in gesture or I limited myself to a smile. For the first time a kind of fear sealed my lips; if I spoke, my voice would come out in a whisper. My language rose as a wall between me and the world around me. Then, secretly, I began to leaf through Andrea's and Matteo's books and learned words that were used every day, with the stealth and the shame of someone who commits a robbery. (p. 95)

Nora's approach-avoidance relationship with the English language is an image for the other social effects of immigration. At times she retreats to old ways and values; at other times the aging mother tries to adapt Italian ideas to Canadian society. Because Nora is not able to remain a traditional Italian wife and mother in her new setting, she is without reference points and isolated from both old and new societies. Indeed, her husband Vanni and her children do not view her in the customary Italian way. Unable to make them understand this restricting condition because she lacks the words to describe it, Nora is often locked in an oppressive silence which suggests near madness and anticipates her ultimate end. Despite her life-long efforts to reach beyond the visible and invisible walls that surround the newcomer, Nora constantly finds herself trapped. In her final days, though her mind is intact, she is physically paralysed and unable to communicate in any way. In *Made in Italy* Nora's wheelchair becomes a symbol, like the cage of immigrant exile. Nora, as a silent observer of life rather than a participant, speaks to the voiceless Italian immigrants she represents.

Given this preoccupation with the need to reach out to people through language, it is understandable that Ardizzi brought out her novel in both Italian and English. In this way the Toronto author attracted both Italian and English readers into the emotional life of Nora Moratti. Does the dual existence of *Made in Italy* alter the nature of the work? Is the author-reader relationship changed? It is worth noting that Ardizzi's second novel, *Il Sapore agro della mia terra* (1984) is published only in Italian. Maybe she became aware of these problems and was also dissatisfied with the English version of *Made in Italy*.

The bilingual collection of poetry and dual language editions of novels change the cultural context of the works. Italian-language works in Canada are addressed to

a small audience. They speak to and for people who share a common background and experiences of dislocation. When these works also exist in English or French they reach a readership that may be outside the particular immigrant experience. Nevertheless the translations also speak to and for these readers. The process is one of integration for the Italians; as English and French speakers come to share the Italian experience in Canada, they also make it their own. The difference, the Italianness that is neither English nor French, is what makes the representation of the emotion recognizable for ethnic readers. The Italian nature of the emotion is changed when it is translated and absorbed into the majority culture.

The Canadianization process is evident in works from ethnic cultures outside European civilization. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1983) demonstrates a tension between integration as an English language work and separation as the depiction of the unique Japanese hardships in western Canada. The poetic narrative style, the translation of the Japanese experience into English, and the sharing all change the very memory that the book tries to preserve. The very nature of this dual state makes *Obasan* a Canadian work.

Ardizzi's *Made in Italy* tests this notion from the other direction. The Italian version of the novel is now sold and read in Italy. Though well received it is not part of Italy's national literature. Ardizzi's Nora Moratti is as foreign to Italian readers as Margaret Laurence's Hagar Shipley. By writing the novel originally in Italian Maria Ardizzi has translated the Italian-Canadian experience into the language of readers in Italy. However, Nora is a Canadian character; *Made in Italy* is a Canadian novel in Italian.

A good deal of ethnic writing is autobiographical in nature, a quest for the true depiction of actual human experiences. Italian-Canadian authors have brought language questions to the difficult enterprise of writing. The search for authenticity becomes one for the right language, the best mode of expression, the faithful translation. Two writers who have directed their academic careers to linguistic pursuits, Alexandre Amprimoz and Filippo Salvatore, demonstrate a profound concern with the languages of everyday speech and literature. Their movement through three languages in their work is a constant reminder of the tension that exists in the novels, stories, poems and plays of these immigrant writers. In a more deliberate manner than Ardizzi, Salvatore and Amprimoz are testing the existence of Canadian writing in different languages.

The Roman-born Alexandre Amprimoz grew up in a multilingual environment and his choice of languages reflects this plurality. He published Italian poems in 1974 and 1975, but has since brought out collections in English and French. In *Selected Poems* (1979), Amprimoz writes verse that is full of references to actual events from his immigrant experience: a Roman childhood, travel in Canada, winter, snow, and history. The presence of French references and quotations in the English poems suggests that the English alone is inadequate to express all the ideas. There is also a disparity within the collection; while the English poems on Rome use no Ital-

ian except place names, the poems on French subjects such as de Tocqueville, are full of French expressions and quotations:

> "Qu'est-ce qu'il
> a dit?" would ask Gustave de Beaumont.
> "Belle image!" would answer
> Alexis de Tocqueville.[15]

Beyond his personal quest for the right language, Amprimoz regards the relationships between the literary language, the personal identity and the cultural survival of an immigrant group as a very complex web. His work shows that the balance between assimilation and ethnicity is a precarious one, and that the writer encounters tremendous pressures to lean in one way or the other. The contrast between the English poems in *Selected Poems* and the French poems in Amprimoz's recent collection, *Conseils aux suicidés*, is striking. The English pieces are autobiographical in tendency and referential in their style; the French poems are spare and experimental.[16] The difference in styles indicates that it is both the two literary traditions that Amprimoz is attempting to use as well as personal inclinations that determine the outcome of his writing. Amprimoz achieves translation bridges among the three contexts in his later collection, *Sur le Damier des tombes*, where the author balances the Italian memory with the Canadian languages. Here the poems, 'Moment Romain' and 'Débuts,' recall the English poems of his Roman childhood in *Selected Poems*:

> c'était après la guerre
> de temps en temps
> ma mère nous abandonnait
> …
> et je revois le train
> s'éloignant dans la nuit
> comme un cigare[17]

These Italian experiences first occurred in that language, then Amprimoz translated them into English and now he has returned to them in French. The same events are recalled in a different language and each time are changed. For Amprimoz the tensions between the various pulls of language and ethnic experiences are strong, the risks high. The quest for the more effective mode of expression in the languages of Canada is a life-long task and preoccupation. In addition to testing the linguistic re-

[15] (Toronto: Hounslow Press 1979) 47.
[16] (Paris: Saint-Germain-des-Prés 1983)
[17] Alexandre Amprimoz, *Sur le Damier des tombes* (Saint-boniface: Éditions du Blé 1983) 23.

silience of Canadian literature, Amprimoz is also developing his own voice as a national writer.

By using only the language of the immigrant minority, the Italian writer remains an outsider, often marginalized behind the language barrier. When he uses English or French he encounters both an obstacle and a powerful attraction. On the one hand he is often unable to learn and use his second language as well as native speakers. Even university-educated Italians are intimidated by this fear. On the other hand, if the writer is successful with his English or French writing, it is often because he has begun to be assimilated into the majority culture. The danger is that the old language and culture are moribund.

In Montréal Filippo Salvatore is taking a similar journey through three languages. He published his first book of poems, *Tufo e Gramigna* (1977) in Italian, later brought out an Italian-English collection, *Suns* of *Darkness*[18] and has recently been working in French. *La Fresque de Mussolini* dramatizes the language and cultural tensions of Italian immigrants in Montréal during the 1930s. His nationalistic Italian characters would normally have spoken Italian to one another; Salvatore has them use French – though with nuances and points of view that are Italian. This historical play becomes a parable in which the Francophone Italians speak to both the Italians in Canada and the Québécois. In one scene Salvatore parodies the preoccupation of both Italians and French with nationalistic reviews of history. He has a senior clergyman list of all the Italians in Canadian history and end his speech with the speculation that

> On m'a même dit que Jean Talon pourrait être Giovanni Tallone...
> Ah, les racines de notre colonie sont bien solides au Canada![19]

By playing with the French and Italian sounds of the name Jean Talon, Salvatore is able to show the absurdity of this view. The use of French in this Italian-Canadian play has given Salvatore a new perspective on the immigrant duality and on the French-English question. In contrast to *La Fresque*, Salvatore has an early Italian poem dedicated to Giovanni Caboto which praises the Italian explorer in traditional terms. Both Amprimoz and Salvatore demonstrate how the choice of language helps to determine our perception of the nature of experience.

The three-way pull of language and culture is part of the dramatic tension in Marco Micone's play, *Gens du silence*.[20] A drama of social criticism, it explores the ambivalent position of Italian immigrants in present day Québec. The impatient Mario bluntly explains to his sister the language conflict faced by the immigrant in Québec:

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[18] (Montreal: Guernica Editions 1980)
[19] *La Fresque de Mussolini* (Montreal: Guernica Editions 1985) 20.
[20] (Montréal: Québec/Amérique 1982). See also Micone, *Addolorata* (Montréal: Guernica Editions 1984).

> Je parle le calabrais avec mes parents, le français avec ma sœur et ma blonde, et l'anglais avec mes chums. (p. 76)

But the Italian immigrants in the poor ghetto still have a fourth language, that of silence. In her argument with her brother Gino, Nancy articulates the voiceless suffering:

> J'enseigne... à des adolescents qui portent tous un nom italien dont la seule culture c'est celle du silence. Silence sur les origines paysannes de leurs parents. Silence sur les causes de l'émigration de leurs parents. Silence sur la manipulation dont ils sont victimes. Silence sur le pays dans lequel ils vivent. Silence sur les raisons de ce silence. (p. 94)

This silence – due to hopelessness within the community and neglect from outside – is now being broken by the writing that we are examining here. Speaking and writing are risky and problematic, since they must deal with the lack of a tradition for Italian-Canadian literature, the choice of language, the search for authentic expression and the need to reach the audience. Frank Paci, the author of *The Italians* (1978) and *The Father* (1984), explains his mission:

> Yes, there was a need to preserve the accomplishments of my parents, with the accent on "serve." I had the voice which they didn't have. It's this very sense of preserving that acts as a catharsis, because as you're writing the story of your parents you're also coming to terms with your background and defining yourself in a historical context. Also, in the very act of writing fiction... you see real life people and things more as they are. This is the humility I spoke about before – a humility that produces compassion.[21]

In Paci's novels domestic conflict is the result of pulls in two directions: on the one hand, there is the old world ties represented by parents and family; on the other, there is the new country fostered by a Canadian education. A dual experience shared by a whole post-war generation of Italian immigrants, it appears in the novels as biography, the biography of a generation shocked by the revelation of selfrecognition. The parents came to Canada to give their children greater opportunities; ironically the very education their children receive in the new country separates them from family and from roots. Paci and other fiction writers, Ardizzi, Minni, Edwards, Madott and Melfi, are looking back over their shoulders to explore their problematic experiences in immigrant families and to translate them for Canadian readers. While the novels and short stories may provide a sense of spiritual resolution to the guilt

[21] C.D. Minni, 'An Interview with Frank G. Paci,' *Canadian Literature* 106 (Fall 1985) 6.

felt by writers and a generation of readers, the works often do not reach the parents, an important audience for these works. Not only is there no literary tradition for Italian-Canadian literature, but part of the social and cultural context is lost behind a barrier of language and illiteracy.

Paci's *Black Madonna* explores the conflict that develops because of the estrangement between an Italian widowed mother, Assunta, and her Canadian-educated children, Marie and Joey.[22] The lack of clear communication in the family is literally due to the gap between separate languages and worlds. Assunta speaks only an Italian dialect while her children use English, having lost the little Italian they knew. When the father, Adamo, dies, the interpreter between the old and new worlds is lost. Isolated from children and the community, the mother reverts to ancient customs of mourning for her dead husband. Joey tries to understand his mother but cannot. Marie is unwilling to make the effort to comprehend the grieving woman's strange behavior. The barriers that have grown up between Marie and Assunta are related to the daughter's desire to assume a new identity as a Canadian and to abandon her immigrant past. Since her old-fashioned mother is a constant reminder of the past, Marie must reject Assunta, by finding her repulsive to her (Marie's) new Canadian sensibility.

> It was just too unfair. Her mother was an illiterate peasant. And even worse – a mail-order bride. Ordered and bought like a piece of furniture. She couldn't understand a thing. She probably milked cows all her life. How could fate have been so cruel? That she had to be the offspring of such a contemptible woman. (pp. 37-8)

Even before the death of her father, Marie and her mother had never lived in harmony. The two women use different languages and perceive one another in different ways. Is the language a symptom or a cause of the enmity between mother and daughter?

> "What's the difference if I speak English or Italian to you? You don't understand either way. I don't care anymore. If you want to know me learn my language. That's all there is to it. And I'm going as far from here as I can get. You can go back to where you came from, for all I care."
> Marie wasn't sure how much her mother had picked up. Sometimes she pretended she understood less than she actually did.
> "Speak Italian, *pazza*."
> "If I want to speak English I'll speak English." (p. 72)

[22] (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1982). See Roberta Sciff-Zamaro, 'Black Madonna: A Search For the Great Mother,' *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing*, ed. J. Pivato (Montreal: Guernica Editions 1985) 77-99.

Immigrant daughter Marie is able to escape the restrictions of an old-fashioned home and her dominant, religious mother by means of university scholarships that take her out of the Italian neighbourhood. Despite her hatred of her past, Marie is shocked by her mother's sudden death. The university-educated Marie has gradually been finding that she has paid a high price for becoming Anglicized. She has lost her language, her culture, her family, her people. Through her suffering Marie begins to investigate her family past. One day she opens her dead mother's old trousseau trunk and puts on one of her mother's black dresses:

> Sometime later she felt her mother's presence in the room… Marie stared harder in the mirror, trying to make out the expression on her mother's face… (p. 192)

The novel ends with Marie making her pilgrimage to Italy to meet her mother's sister, Zia Pia. On this trip she retraces her mother's steps as an immigrant bride. By putting herself not only in her mother's black dress but also in her place, Marie is able to translate the inarticulate Italian immigrant experience for the articulate Canadian mind. Marie's act transcends the language and generation gaps. In this spiritual transference, Assunta returns to Italy in the person of her daughter, symbolized by the black dress of the black madonna.

For Paci the two languages that immigrant children learn to use in separate contexts represent not only cultural barriers and generation gaps, but also personal states of schizophrenia. In his third novel, *The Father*, Paci explores this split experience as it is manifested by two brothers.[23] Stephen Mancuso grows up speaking Italian at home, the language of the family, of love and the other emotions. Outside he learns English, the language of school, business and public communication. Gradually, as he furthers his education, he loses the use of Italian but has not been able to transfer the emotional dimension to the second language. Stephen becomes a cold, rational philosophy professor, while his brother, Michael, turns into a wild musician. The conflict between the two brothers, the disparities in their temperaments and life choices, reflect the results of the dual language experience: the splitting of emotion from reason, heart from head. Like Marie, Stephen must search to resolve this imbalance. With his ailing mother and brother, Michael, he re-examines his dead father's life. This simple man combined both passion and reason in his work and stands as an example that Stephen can emulate. It is the former generation, voiceless, inarticulate in language, that speaks the loudest in the novels of Frank Paci.

As English-language writers, Paci, Minni, di Michele and Di Cicco have had to come to terms with the language duality. In their work they are attempting to translate the Italian language of emotion, the lost language, into the English of their new culture without losing the authenticity of the original experience. Antonino Mazza

[23] (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1984)

has promoted this process by translating the Italian poet, Eugenio Montale, into English.[24]

In the novel, *The Lion's Mouth*, Caterina Edwards uses the work itself as a means of resolving the duality question.[25] Like Grove, Edwards uses a fictional self, Bianca, the narrator, in order to work out her obsession with Italy. Bianca's passion is personified in her Venetian cousin, Marco, and captured in Venice itself. The Italian-Canadian narrator lives in Edmonton, but this is only her external city; her inner city is Venice. The old city of canals, its culture, pride, decadence and decay, are personified in Marco, and are in contrast to Bianca's white innocence and the newness and energy of the prairie city.

Though separated by thousands of miles and different languages and cultures, Bianca tries to cross these barriers, to capture a part of Venice and bring it over to Canada. Her perception of Venice, her dream of Marco, must be translated into Canadian idioms. This process takes the form of the novel itself. Bianca confesses at the end of the narrative:

> Why have I spent my winter telling your story? 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 – you are the grain of sand that began the pearl that is my dream… With me, it is always stories. And in the end it is all I can offer you – your story. I recreate your infancy, your childhood, trying to understand. I imagine the bombings, the operation. I look out through your eyes. I become you. I make the story, the book.
>
> Still. Still. I cannot write it in Italian, and you do not read English. I will never touch you at all. (pp. 179-80)

Every translation reveals another barrier. Italian-Canadian writers are trying to impregnate their new languages with the meaning and emotion left behind in the old language. Their growing contribution to Canadian literature is one of expanding the boundaries beyond the restriction of a single ethnic culture. The process of translation that Paci, Edwards, Amprimoz, Salvatore, Micone, Ardizzi and others have undertaken has three important aspects. It is helping to make us all more conscious of our languages and their positive and negative effects on our lives. The novels, poems and plays interpret the Italian immigrant experience for the benefit of both English and French Canadians. This is aided by the fact that Italian-Canadian writers have openly supported the bilingual nature of their new country by adopting one or the other of our official languages. The most important task for Italian-Canadian writers

[24] Antonino Mazza, trans., *The Bones of Cuttlefish* [Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di Seppia* (Milano 1982)] (Oakville: Mosaic Press 1983). On the other hand, Amprimoz has translated the French poems of Cécile Cloutier into English; see *Springtime of spoken words* (Toronto: Hounslow Press 1979).

[25] (Edmonton: NeWest Press 1982)

has been the uncovering and the translation of their immigrant experience as an act of self-discovery for Italians in Canada. Only by beginning to understand ourselves can we hope to understand others. In one of his early poems, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco captures this idea of translation and discovery:

Donna Italiana

> Lady, I cannot help myself in you. There is the
> song of three thousand years, of little old men with the
> eyes of saints, they walk on the hillsides in the mid-day heat,
> ghosts, wishing me well. They are my grandfathers and my
> great-grandfathers,
>
> and the ancient men that kept my ribs burning at Monte Cassino, in the air above my brother's corpse, in the shelled house in Arezzo, in
>
> Rimini, where I sat spread-eagled on the sand; they kept the ribs burning through the cold Montreal nights...
>
> ...Only you persuade me that the hills were white. Only you persuade me that the ribs bum less and only when a woman is
>
> the country that I love.[26]

Reference: *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1987, p. 60-76.

[26] *The Tough Romance* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1979) 68.