

# Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

---

Number 6 *Combined Issue 6-7 Spring/Autumn*

Article 25

---

1994

## Frail Identities Along the Canadian Shield

Alessandro Carrera

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

---

### Recommended Citation

Carrera, Alessandro (1994) "Frail Identities Along the Canadian Shield," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*. Vol. 6 , Article 25.

Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol6/iss1/25>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact [mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu), [hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu](mailto:hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu).

# Frail Identities along the Canadian Shield

Alessandro Carrera

Review-essay on *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing*, edited by Joseph Pivato. Montréal: Guernica, 1985; second edition, 1991

No definition of ethnicity escapes the Foucauldian exclusion procedure according to which the identity of an ethnic community is mainly a response created and shaped precisely by the same discursive practices that have defined, from the outside, the community itself. It is paradoxical that ethnic minorities, to foster their identity, often give an image of themselves that would have not existed outside the minority status accorded by the majority, thus granting to the majority, by tacit definition, the privilege of not being "ethnic" at all. This powerful case of dialectic-through-exclusion creates cultures that find their actual survival in their being left out of the "mainstream" discursive practices at work in the society.<sup>1</sup> Confronted with the growing perplexity that arises

---

from this situation, an increasing number of "ethnic" intellectuals is questioning whether reinforcing ethnic identification is a move toward emancipation or toward conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Is ethnic identification leading forward, toward the acceptance of the new, or backward, to the mere retention of the past? Can such an "archaic" value as ethnic identity really permit new reactions to new conditions? To answer these questions we must interrogate ethnicity thoroughly in its double nature—not only as an "archaic" value, but also as a "postmodern" one, a matter of cultural consent as much as of bloodline.<sup>3</sup> The ambiguity of the notion of ethnicity lies in its being both a point of arrival and a point of departure. In the case of Italian immigrants to North America, the awareness of being ethnic Italians did not precede their landing on the new soil. Due to the fragmented history of Italy, the immigrants retained their loyalty and their sense of belonging to their village, to their city or, at best, to their region. Italy was mainly an abstraction for them. When they were forced by their new condition to see themselves as an ethnic community, being (and becoming) Italian became for them both fate and decision, carrying out an entire array of social expectations that the new community had to fulfill in order to acquire and strengthen its old-new identity. As a point of arrival, ethnicity had to define itself against (and by the means of) the mainstream. As a point of departure, and after generations of sons of immigrants, ethnicity can not help by challenging the very notion of mainstream, and, as a necessary consequence, the very notion of ethnic identity. The challenge does not come without risks, yet for the ethnic writer this is the only battlefield worth fighting. Ethnic literature (and cinema as well, but here we will focus on literature) finds its role today only on this shifting ground. The relationship between literature and ethnicity is actually dangerous for both, but the danger still awaits to be recognized in its nature. The result is the reciprocal strengthening of the ethnic community and its literature or the disintegration of both. A richly developed ethnic literature, this is the point, is not ethnic anymore; it has entered another realm. Such danger is very present to the mind of the theorists of an ethnic-oriented culture. Defensively, they try to apply to ethnic writings a comfortable adaptation of the notion of "minor literature" as it has been proposed in 1976 by Deleuze and Guattari: Minor literature as a literature whose language "is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization," whose cramped space "forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics," and where "every-

thing takes on a collective value." Indeed, "precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that 'master' and that could be separated from a collective enunciation."<sup>4</sup> Let us put aside for now the glory of a literature without masters. That a literary enunciation may "connect immediately to politics" makes us immediately suspicious. Suspicion increases if, instead of relying solely upon Deleuze and Guattari, we bother to read their source, Kafka's diaries. It is true that Kafka was aware of the "deterritorialization" of his own situation, as a German-speaking Jew in the Czech nation. He was a member of a minority which nonetheless enjoyed the cultural privilege of sharing the language of the ruling German class and of its literature. Pondering the contradictions of his own situation, Kafka even came to the point of defining "impossible" the endeavor of Prague Jewish writers (letter to Max Brod of June 1921). It is also true that Kafka recognized and even admired the collective appeal of the literature of "small nations" (*kleine Nationen*), like Polish-Jewish and Czech literatures, and admitted that communities do need a literature that is just the keeping of the diary (*Tagebuchföhren einer Nation*). Themes like the settling of contrasts between fathers and sons, as well as quick connections between literature and politics, are better dealt within a *kleine Litteratur* than in a *grosse Litteratur* like the German one. Nonetheless Kafka perceived acutely his estrangeness to minor literatures and, even though there are no derogatory overtones in his calling those literatures "minor," he knew that "non-minor" literature is simply not just the diary of its people, and that the price that *kleine Litteraturen* pay is the lack of real talent and the "universal delight" that is taken "in the literary treatment of petty themes [*kleiner Themen*] whose scope is not permitted to exceed the capacity of small enthusiasm and which are sustained by their polemical possibilities."<sup>5</sup>

To anyone who chooses to raise the flag of minor literature as the true expression of an ethnic minority, it has to be reminded that in the Western literature of the 20th century the dividing line between "minor" and "non-minor" literature goes not along ethnic lines but along the central notion of the identity of the subject. "Minor" literature claims that its subject is dismembered due to purely contingent reasons (i. e., the immigration) and aims at reconstructing its personal identity as well as the identity of its group. On the contrary, "non-minor" literature, since Modernism

had its dawn, has undertaken the task of questioning and dismantling every assumption of identity. "Minor" literature dwells on foundation myths without really creating them; its job is re-working and preserving them, often with the result of involuntarily wearing them out. "Non-minor" modern literature is the ultimate threat to any foundation myth. Just by the means of its endless affabulation, "non-minor" literature has corroded any notion of "foundation" or "grounding." *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the perfect example of a foundation myth that destroys itself to the point of never having existed, except in the literature that shaped it. True, García Márquez is a "national" writer, not an "ethnic" one. But who or what decides where he belongs, if not the sheer threshold of modernity (or postmodernity) that he has been able to cross?

Theorists of ethnic literature do not seem to have fully grasped the complexity of these questions. In "Bound by Distance: Italian-Canadian Writing as Decontextualized Subaltern," Pasquale Verdicchio asserts that Italian-Canadian writers like Antonio D'Alfonso, Marco Micone, and Dire Michelut are expressing a degree of "coscientization" (the word is taken from Paolo Freire) that would have been unattainable in the Italian national context. They represent a flourishing of "organic intellectuals" in purely Gramscian terms, on the verge of constituting themselves as an "historical bloc." "The difference between the organic intellectual and the traditional intellectual" writes Verdicchio, "resides in the fact that the organic intellectual acts as an agent for its constituency of origin, while the traditional intellectual abandons that constituency in order to join and represent the interests of the official culture."<sup>6</sup> It is our hope that Italian-Canadian writers will not let themselves be entangled in such delusions. The question seems trivial, but it is worth asking: Is this constituency of origin an "ethnic" or a "political" one? Have we distorted Gramsci to the point of confusing social class with ethnic group? The line that used to divide the "traditional intellectual" from the "organic intellectual" was drawn within the framework of the old, beloved, "modern" class struggle, not along the floating and "postmodern" territories of ethnic divisions. And when does an intellectual "abandon" his or her constituency? When he sets a novel in a social environment outside his "origin"? Or when he questions the very notions of "constituency" and "origin"? Does he become a "traitor" in doing so? (In *O zappatore*, the famous Neapolitan *sceneggiata*, the patriarch peasant father

says to his son who has joined the Neapolitan leisure life: "Better you'd remained a hoer! A hoer does not desert his mother!")

Verdicchio disregards "the formation of institutionalized multiculturalism agencies which require a specific set of themes from a writer in order to be qualified as 'ethnic'" (26), but his criticism of institutionalized ethnicism as a "strategy of containment" adopted by the dominant culture, although justified, falls short of the target. Multiculturalism does not neutralize the "political immediacy and [the] collective assemblage of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari again) since there is no, and there has never been, such a thing as "political immediacy." In a society where groups are increasingly pressured to define themselves in terms of radically narrowed interests, a "collective assemblage of enunciation" of which the organic intellectual is the voice is simply nowhere to be found. As Paolo Valesio has pointed out, of the three characteristics of Deleuze and Guattari's "minor" literature, only the de-territorialization of language is worth considering today, while other claims, especially if they are extrapolated from the European context of the seventies, verge on the grotesque.<sup>7</sup> It is true, as Verdicchio says, that to present the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers as the cultural representative of the "Italian community" would be nothing more "than a variation upon the rule of state" (30), but there is no "immediate" political constituency, outside that of institutionalized multiculturalism, waiting to embrace its authors, and it is not reasonable to think that such a clear-cut community will be shaped in the near future. Furthermore, and at the risk of sounding bourgeois, we have to stress that the writer has no responsibility whatsoever toward any constituency. A writer signs an untold contract with his/her readership with the clause that literature is not meant to fulfill any pre-established expectation on the side of the reader, and that each one of the contracting parties has the right to withdraw from the deal at any time, either changing the settings or not buying the book.

The selection of essays that Joseph Pivato (a Professor of Comparative Literature at Athabasca University in Edmonton, Alberta) has collected in *Contrasts* was originally published in 1985. Its second, 1991, edition gives us the opportunity to reconsider many of the issues that we have been taking on here. In his opening essay, "Ethnic Writing and Comparative Canadian Literature," Pivato challenges the notion that has circulated among many scholars and critics of Canadian literature, accord-

---

ing to which Canadian literature is by definition written in English or in French, while all other writings belong to their specific literature and to their language. Against this simplification Pivato proposes, as a working definition of ethnic writing in Canada, the following one: "A writing that is concerned with the meeting of two (or more) cultures in which one of the cultures is anglophone or francophone" (30). What is "Canadian literature" may be an uncertain subject, but the amount of literary work now produced in Canada definitely belongs to more than one (or two) cultures and more than one (or two) languages.<sup>8</sup> In "A Literature of Exile: Italian Language Writing in Canada," Pivato stresses his point with a rhetorical gesture very common in Italian-American criticism, to the point of acting as a foundation myth. Pivato connects the literary experience of Italian exiles to the founding figures of Latin and Italian literature: Aeneas looking for a new homeland, Dante exiled from Florence, and Renzo and Lucia struggling to return home become the archetypes of every expatriate Italian literature. A difficult relation with an idolized past is here at work, and we will return to the matter when discussing D'Alfonso's essay and his views on the Italian tradition. In "The Italian Writer and Language," Fulvio Caccia chooses to use the expression "minority literature" instead of immigrant literature, but when he claims to have borrowed the term from the already mentioned Deleuze and Guattari essay on Kafka, one can not help reminding the reader that *littérature mineure* or *kleine Litteratur*—a literature of "small nations," as Kafka says—is not necessarily a minority literature. Not all small nations are minorities. The confusion brings the author, despite helpful insights on the re-territorialization of languages in the Italian-Canadian experience and on Italian as Language of Religion and Return (like Hebrew for the Jews), to some awkward references to "Kafka's method" supposedly shared by Kafka and the Québécois author Réjean Ducharme (162-63). Such "method" is allegedly based on an "intensive use of language" capable of "disorganizing its own form in order to free pure content" (quoted from Deleuze and Guattari) and the elimination of all metaphors in order to recapture the language of Myth and of Return. The conclusion is surprising: "For the Italian writing in French, the route chosen by Kafka (which is here borrowed by Ducharme) is without doubt the most interesting one" (164). Following this argument one concludes that, since Kafka was a "minority writer," he was therefore a "minor" writer. But, despite the obvious fact that Kafka was no "minor" writer, what

matters is that his relationship to the Jewish community and to Yiddish literature and theatre was exactly the opposite of the minority writer who identifies with his community. Kafka, for reasons that are too intricate and that would place too heavy a burden on the shoulders of every minority writer, did not belong. It is puzzling to see that, due to the current (and belated) *fortuna americana* enjoyed by Deleuze and Guattari's assessments, Kafka is turning into the most unexpected icon of ethnic literary criticism. A faraway saint, speaking through the voices of his bizarre spokespersons and not through his own, since not many seem to care about who he was and what he really wrote.

The dawdling between "minor" or "minority" literature originates from the double status of ethnic identity having to define itself along the lines drawn by the current ruling discursive practices. What complicates the matter is that, in a country like Canada, these practices are not so powerful either. Canada is one of the few countries in the world whose major authors, with the exception of Margaret Laurence and a few others, are still alive. Pivato refuses Margaret Atwood's claim that Canada as a whole is an oppressed or exploited minority.<sup>9</sup> English-speaking Irish immigrants in Montréal did not have the same immigrant status of Russian Jews in Winnipeg (23). And he has a point. Yet at the core of Atwood's statement lies the awareness that Anglo-Saxon or French Canadians may be bragging about their identity with the newcomers, while at the bottom of their heart they are as insecure as any immigrant group.<sup>10</sup> (Roberta Sciff-Zamaro's "Black Madonna: A Search for the Great Mother" shows convincingly the thematic affinities carved in the mother-daughter relationship between Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and Frank Paci's *Black Madonna*.) Actually, Canadian minority writers have the opportunity to challenge the notion of mainstream because they live in a country where the foundations of this notion are still shaky. Being Italian-Canadian means first of all being Canadian. One has not to abandon its own heritage, because Canada is the tribe made of the people who once belonged to another tribe. A certain degree of literary schizophrenia is probably the price to pay to recognize oneself as a Canadian writer, yet skipping the Great Canadian Unknown for the illusion of a direct lineage from Italian literature is even worse. In their "Death Between Two Cultures: Italian-Canadian Poetry," Alexandre L. Amprimoz and Sante A. Viselli indulge in the most common strategy of escape, the quick comparison between the immigrant poem and the Founder Fathers of



Italian literature. Every allusion to death becomes a replica of Dante's *Inferno*, every apostrophe follows "a Virgil-Dante relationship" (113), every reference to Tuscany in the poetry of Pier Giorgio Di Cicco "alludes to the cities of Dante and Petrarca" (115). On commenting Mary Di Michele's poignant poem "How to Kill Your Father" Amprimoz and Viselli admit that "the child can have an independent life only by ritualistically killing the father, and this back in Italy." But then they ask, worriedly: "Does this mean rejecting Italy and things Italian? Is there not a danger here of committing cultural suicide in order to embrace North American values?" (117). A cultural suicide would be committed if Italian-Canadian poets, like Di Cicco and Di Michele, refused to address the matter (which they did not). Amprimoz and Viselli worry that when an "ethnic" writer is accepted into the mainstream he may have moved "into another realm in which he is no longer himself" (118). If Canadian multiculturalism is a strategy of containment, Amprimoz and Viselli's is a strategy of self-containment, pairing exactly the disdained institutionalized multiculturalism. As if Italian-Canadian writers lived in a "realm" miraculously protected from that bad company known as "mainstream"! As if they were not writing in English or in French! As if they were not as North American as any other North American! Your identity, the vestals of multiculturalism warn, may dissolve into a context of cultural death. But losing one's own identity is not the end of the literature as we know it: it is the beginning. (At least Robert Billings, in his "Contemporary Influences on the Poetry of Mary di Michele," shows that she has been influenced by the Toronto poetry scene of the seventies as well as by Pavese.)

In "The Road Between: Essentialism. For an Italian Culture in Quebec and Canada," Antonio D'Alfonso puts things straight when he observes: "Being an Italian is nothing to be frightened of or arrogant about. It is a fact of life. . . . You have to become yourself" (211) because "one is not born an Italian; one becomes an Italian; especially when you are not born in Italy" (210). If we think that "becoming Italian" was what happened to Marinetti and to Ungaretti (both born in Alexandria of Egypt and raised in Paris), and that Alberto Savinio and Italo Svevo have never been solely Italian, the situation described by D'Alfonso has its counterpart in the Old Country too. D'Alfonso makes it clear that he does not believe in assimilation. He is in favor of difference, of cultural and individual difference. The voice of an Italian-Canadian poet, he says, is not like the voice of an English-

---

Canadian or a French-Canadian. For that reason, he points out, "if Italian writers in Canada and Quebec want to leave their indelible traces on our culture they must study and absorb Italian literary tradition as well as English and French" (220). Who could disagree? D'Alfonso is right when he says that Italian-Canadian writers have to allow their Canadian readership to understand the tradition from which they come. In order to make this tradition understood one has to master it. Learning Italian language and literature is therefore a necessary stage of teaching and self-teaching. But D'Alfonso undermines the complexity that the word "tradition" carries on at the end of the 20th century. "Our outcries" writes D'Alfonso, "sound like Dido's laments; our verve is like Aeneas's verve and our feasts always have a Circe among the guests" (220). It is not so. Not even archetypes can live on their own. They must be nourished by constant re-working. Modernism has struggled endlessly with myths and gods precisely because of the growing awareness that the "tradition of literature" had somewhat been broken. Unlike what happens in an 18th-century pastoral drama, gods do not appear in modern poetry just because they are named. They must be painfully evoked, and the language that performs this task is constantly at the risk of being lost. Ungaretti is deeply rooted in the "Italian tradition" from Jacopone and Petrarca to Leopardi, yet his "Cori di Didone," before sounding "like Dido's laments," sound very much like the laments of a language that must give birth to itself at every line, and where not a single word is taken for granted on the basis of its belonging to the tradition. American culture, as Mary Di Michele has written, teaches you "how to kill your father." Afterwards, you discover that (as Pavese knew very well) you have to give birth to your own forefathers and to create your own tradition. Unfortunately, ethnicity may be a Postmodern idea, but a great amount of ethnic literature (and its criticism) is still pre-modern, finding its space between folklore and subculture. This is not meant to be a merely negative judgment. Subcultures, as articulated responses of an intellectual or an ethnic minority to the challenge of mainstream, are essential to the cultural survival of difference, and in our shifting world today's subculture is tomorrow's mainstream. Yet the question is whether the ideology of ethnic literature in the Italian-American context is on the forefront or in the background of the evolution of the community. The culture of the Italian immigrants did not include books, not only because they were not literate, but also because (unlike in Jewish

---

and Protestant traditions) the authority on which the Catholic Church based its power was more the word of the priest than the Bible. For the American-born children of the immigrants literacy became synonymous with becoming American, meaning at the same time a painful detachment from the oral authority of the parents and the need to recreate, in writing, the waning voice of orality. Then, in a short span of time, Italian-American culture has moved rapidly “from what [Walter J.] Ong labels as primary orality to literacy to secondary orality—the orality that occurs in the electronic media experience.”<sup>11</sup> Literature is justly perceived as a danger by oral cultures: When the myth becomes a text, you discover that, well, it is nothing more than a text, and that the multiplicity of interpretation will soon replace the authority of the recounting voice. A strong oral culture will try anything to contain the corrosive power of literature, and the subliminal message that the ethnic writer receives is often: Thou shalt not be different from your fathers, and if you deviate from your tradition you will have to be accountable for it before the ethnic tribunal of your community. An ethnic writer rooted in that short-lived literacy whose aim is to recall the fading oral authority of the fathers is very likely to submit himself to the command, thus respecting the oral subalternity as the true legacy to be passed on to the new generations. Either he will endlessly complain that his written page is not able to recall the vividness of the lost voices, or he will reshape the notion of organic intellectual on an ethnic basis in order to fulfill the unspoken injunction of loyalty. It is a serious struggle, whose outcome is sometimes neutralization of literature, and more often silence. In Marco Micone’s *Voiceless People* a character named Nancy says: “I teach teenagers who all have Italian names and who have one culture, that of silence. Silence about the peasant origin of their parents. Silence about the manipulation they’re victims of. Silence about the country they live in. Silence about the reason of their silence.”<sup>12</sup> Silence is a legacy too, perhaps the most demanding one. Yet such silence is not specifically Italian. In Canada as much as in the United States the key word for any immigrant community is “pride.” In North America you can be proud of your heritage but until you have reached economic success you can not be proud of yourself. This is in sharp contrast with the rural societies where the greatest values bestowed upon the lower classes were humility and resignation, and where poverty was more a fate than a failure. Within the North American context, silence about the peasant origin of par-

---

ents is a North American silence, a strategy of careful shame waiting for the declaration of ethnic pride as its reversal.<sup>13</sup> From silence to pride, such is the path of the successful minorities. The abovementioned vestals warning ethnic writers not to embrace majority values have still to grasp how much the very notion of ethnic pride depends upon those feared majority values. This is a very delicate point. Pride is a powerful and necessary tool in competitive societies, but when it becomes an ideology it tends to replace the simple notion of dignity that every human being deserves, regardless of his or her economic success and of his or her cultural background. The belief that "if you can't be proud of some accomplishments you ain't worth nothing" did not preexist the immigration. Neither did the obsessive search for "role models" and the subsequent desperation when role models fail their social performance. Shifting pride from the competitive field of accomplishments to the embracing notion of ethnic pride is not the solution either. It is pure displacement of the symptom. Ethnic pride is often a progressive force, pushing the community to the best performance (or what is considered to be the best performance within the framework of the majority values); yet its ideology has conservative and defensive roots, shaped by the same discursive practices that have drawn the boundaries between non-ethnic and ethnic communities. Emphasis on ethnicity, with its mixture of postmodern and archaic features, is always a conservative value, one which communities lean mostly when the society is uncertain of its route and the collective identity is besieged.

There is nothing inherently wrong in being conservative. Conservatism is sometimes necessary, sometimes poisonous—a good or a bad choice according to the different situation in which a community finds itself. It is often a testament of love. And ethnic literature, in its endless coming to terms with Mom and Dad, is essentially an act of love. But, who is writer's Mom, who is writer's Dad? The present-day writer can be a revolutionary or a reactionary in politics; in the long run, his personal choices do not seem to matter very much, since some of the most revolutionary literature of the 20th century has been written by conservatives. Yet a writer is not allowed to be conservative in literature. He must reach a point in his life when he is like Jesus Christ asking "Who is this woman?" before his mother. He can not remain a child forever, neither of his tradition nor of his community. Writers who do not have the strength to question and, when nec-

essary, abandon their own roots will perhaps find their way in the safe havens of institutionalized multiculturalism. Their life will be busy and satisfying. Supported and at the same time restrained "by the reverence they are accorded by common consent,"<sup>14</sup> they will produce a large amount of minor literature. But who cares for minor literature anymore, other than minor literates?

1. These issues have been addressed by the Italian-Canadian author Nino Ricci in his lecture "On the Ethnicizing of Canada," which will appear in the proceedings of the international conference *Canada ed Italia verso il 2000: Metropoli a confronto*, organized by the Centro Interuniversitario di Studi sul Canada delle Universities of Milan and Pisa, and held in Milan in April 1992.

2. The Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada, better known as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, was proclaimed in 1971. Despite some merits of the official multiculturalist policy, which have brought to light many segments of Canadian society that would not have any opportunity to come out otherwise, it is now debated whether the multiculturalist option has been a progressive social policy or a merely opportunist political move, prompted by Pierre Trudeau's government in order to sedate Québec's claims and acquire ethnic votes at the same time. In a recent article, Trinidadian-Canadian writer Neil Bissoondath has been very critical of the Multiculturalism Act: "In its rush, the act appears to indulge in several unexamined assumptions: that people, coming here from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreigners. It treats newcomers as exotics and pretends that this is both proper and sufficient...Multiculturalism...has highlighted our differences rather than diminished them, has heightened division rather than encouraged union. More than anything else, the policy has led to the institutionalization and enhancement of a ghetto mentality." (Neil Bissoondath, "A Question of Belonging," *Globe and Mail*, January 28, 1993. The article is excerpted from *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*, ed. by William Kaplan, Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.) Bissoondath sees the alternative to multiculturalism in a society that is not only tolerant (which may lead to indifference) but truly accepting.

3. See Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986), and *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

4. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, transl. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1986): 16-17 [*Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1975):. 29-31].

5. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, Vol. 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1948, 1962), 194. In this edition, Kafka's notes on small literatures are collected as entries of December 25, 1911. In the most recent German edition of Kafka's *Tagebucher*, based on the manuscript (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990), the same notes are scattered through December 25, 26, and 27 (312-26 of Vol. 1, passim).

6. Pasquale Verdicchio, "Bound by Distance: Italian-Canadian Writing as Decontextualized Subaltern," *VIA*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 1992, p. 24, 25.

7. Paolo Valesio, "Riscoperte poetiche dell'America," *Annali d'Italianistica*, Vol. 10, 1992, pp. 308-09.

8. In the preface to his recent Italian anthology of English Canadian short

stories, Branko Gorjup points out that, due to the relevant work of Canadian writers abroad like Mavis Gallant and the early Margaret Laurence, one cannot speak of a single national literary tradition immediately recognizable as Canadian. See *Musica silente. Racconti canadesi contemporanei*, ed. by Branko Gorjup, transl. by Francesca Valente and Carla Pezzini Plevano (Catanzaro: Abramo, 1992), 20. If Hugh MacLennan, with his 1945 novel *Two Solitudes*, had created a powerful metaphor for the bicultural condition of Canada, the actual condition is of many cultures, many solitudes, and a difficult struggle to achieve a collective identity whose uniqueness lies in its being made of many identities (Massimo Rubboli, *Il Canada. Un federalismo imperfetto (1864-1990)*, Firenze: Giunti, 1992: 70.). Neil Bissoondath takes on the same metaphor when he says that the multicultural problem, as it is experienced in Canada, lies in "a divisiveness so entrenched that we face a future of multiple solitudes with no central notion to bind us."

9. Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972): 35.

10. Andrew H. Malcolm, a former Toronto Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*, recalls one night when, in a Toronto school, fourth-grade children presented a puppet beauty pageant show: "'My name is Betty Lou Jones,' said the first contestant in that fraudulent accent that Canadians think sounds like the American South, 'and I'm from Durham, North Carolina.' 'Hello,' said the next young lady puppet, 'my name is Amy Sue Barker. And I'm from Little Rock, Arkansas.' The last puppet finalist spoke very softly, and the chuckling parents hushed and strained to hear. 'My name is Roberta Mackenzie, and I'm from Canada,' she said. 'But I don't know what that is.' The immediate, knowing outburst of parental laughter ignited prolonged applause that required extra bows all around. Somehow, with their natural openness and honesty, those nine-year-olds had struck a key chord in the Canadian personality. . . . After more than 360 years of settlement and after nearly one and a quarter centuries of independence, no one—least of all, Canadian themselves—has been able to tell Canadians who they are." (Malcolm H. Arnold, *The Canadians*, New York: Times Books, 1985: 55.) There is a certain degree of *schadenfreude* in Malcolm's account. Americans may laugh at Canada but they are not always so assured in their identity when confronted with Europeans. And then again, well-rooted, secular Europeans now feel insecure when confronted with ethnic and religious fundamentalisms struggling at their doors. Wouldn't it be better to admit with Goethe that all human beings are nothing but *trabe gäste auf der dunklen Erde*, melancholic guests on the dark Earth?

11. Fred L. Gardaphé, "From Oral Tradition to the Written Word: Toward an Ethnographically Based Literary Criticism," in *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, edited by Anthony Julian Tamburri, Paolo A. Giordano, and Fred L. Gardaphé (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1991): 302.

12. Marco Micone, *Voiceless People*, transl. from French by Maurizia Binda (Montréal: Guernica, 1984): 71 [*Gens du silence* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982)].

13. Once a community reaches middle-class status, the reasons for being silent decrease dramatically. Like Marco Micone's Nancy, I teach Canadian college students who have all Italian names, but their relationship with their *italianità* is not of silence. They belong to the middle and lower middle class, they travel to Italy once in a while and, as long as they can escape the close guard of their adult relatives and the parochial atmosphere of the *paese*, they seem to enjoy their trip very much. They go to the beach, eat a lot, buy clothes, go to the discotheque and occasionally visit a museum or attend a cultural event. They do not seem too uncomfortable with their being Italian-Canadian. For them, Italy is not so much the Land of Return as the Land of Dreamed Vacation—and of

course they are perfectly right. They are not their parents, and their country is Canada. But ethnic associations do not give up easily on this matter. I have witnessed a rather awkward meeting in which Italian scholars of immigrant literature as well as members of an Italian-Canadian association interviewed Italian-Canadian college students to make sure they still spoke their dialect at home and (which is probably ethnically correct) spent their holidays in their Italian region of origin and not in Florida. It is true that there was a high degree of loyalty, not to say complicity, between the interviewers and the interviewed. In the Canadian situation one has to be ethnically visible in order not to be put aside. If an ethnicity must be declared, better it be loud than softly. Some of the students gave handbook-type answers, launching into such an adamant defense of traditional Italian family values that it made me wish to apply for a Swedish citizenship.

14. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, Vol. 1: 193 [*Tagebucher*, Vol. 1: 321].