The Emergence of Italian Canadian Theatre from 1947 to the present

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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In the very rugged archipelago that the Italian education system is, I consider myself 'like gold to airy thinness beat' whenever I think of my first French teacher, Mrs

ABSTRACT

This thesis represents the first study of Italian Canadian theatre. By Italian Canadian theatre, I mean plays written in Canada by Italian immigrants, in Italian dialect, Italiese, English or French. The criteria I followed are obviously selective, yet still important. Particularly, the primary sources discussed here have been chosen from within a corpus which explicitly addresses the ways in which Italian and Canadian cultures have combined to shape the emergence of distinctive identity-based dramatic texts, even when these play texts seem to have embraced more universal interests.

1947 marks a significant milestone, coinciding as it does with the removal of the Enemy Alien Act, in which the Canadian government officially proclaimed all Italians to be 'enemy aliens' and forbade them entry in the country. A new wave of immigration to Canada from Italy began then. The theatre that emerged in those early days speaks of communities striving to survive emotionally in unknown territory, expressing a growing awareness of what Italian immigrants brought with them and how this affected what they had been before. Unlike earlier theatre works, post-1947 theatre also reflects on what these immigrants became in Canada and on how new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships were continually being created, negotiated, and transformed.

In order to examine Italian Canadian theatre, work needs to be considered within drama, anthropology, ethnography, and cultural studies. Research in these disciplines is helpful because it reflects on ethnic identities in terms of emergent cultures writing emergent literatures. The act of emergence implies a rereading of the canon through intertextual, interliterary, and interartistic networks of exchange. This emergence is calculated according to its distance from the national referent, and the theoretical model

proposed recognises the complex participation of various types of change – transformations, discontinuities, and continuities.

Following this theoretical framework, my thesis places emphasis on three case studies around questions of emergence in Italian Canadian theatre: a period of community-building amateur theatricals in which Italian Canadian identities are established (1947–1974); a phase when Italian Canadian theatre emerges as 'multicultural' and as part of the subsidised arts sector through the politics of recognition of the Canadian government (1973–1997); and a third period in which Italian Canadian theatre is still emerging and is increasingly being recognised beyond national borders (1996–present).

Since this is the first in-depth study of Italian Canadian theatre, there is a need to account for its historical emergence. Emergence doubles here as a historical category which reads the chosen theatre works as documents speaking to the concerns of the Italian immigrants to Canada at specific moments in history. This is not to say that the plays selected here merely reflect their own conditions of production: a cultural historical approach is needed. Cultural history reads these works not just as passively marked with the imprint of history, but also as one of the ways in which history is made and remade. Moreover, it studies the construction of the subject, the extent to which and the mechanisms through which individuals are attached to particular identities, and the shape and characteristics of those identities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Edwards, Caterina. 1986. *Homeground*. Toronto: Guernica.   ***H***

Melfi, Mary. 1996. *Sex Therapy*. Toronto: Guernica.   ***ST***

Melfi, Mary. 2008. *My Italian Wife*. Toronto: Guernica.   ***MIW***

Micone, Marco. 1982. *Gens du silence*. Montréal: Guernica.   ***GDS***

Micone, Marco. 1983. *Addolorata*. Montréal: Guernica.   ***A***

Micone, Marco. 1987. *Déjà l'agonie*. Montréal: l'Hexagone.   ***DLA***

Nardi, Tony. 1979. *La Storia dell'Emigrante*. Canada: CEAD. [Recording].   ***R***

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever I read histories of ethnic Canadian theatre,[1] I get the annoying, though perhaps utterly unjustified, feeling that their main themes are supposed to consist of descriptions of local colour – natural, cultural, psychological. Memories of ethnic neighbourhoods a few generations ago, pride and admiration of pioneer ancestries, loneliness and alienation – these are some of the major themes. Even worse, more often than not, the entire volume is inexplicably centred around the 'immigrant experience' (Cacilla Martinelli and Sensi-Isolani 1993; Ciongoli and Parini 1997; diFranco 1988; Di Giovanni 1984; LaGumina et al. 2000; Mangione 1993; Pugliese 1999) – as if an ethnic community[2] could only claim full-fledged legitimacy as a single, homogenous block. For the immigrant in question, it seems as if there are only two ways open: acceptance or rejection. 'Everything considered, life in Canada is great,' declare the advocates of acceptance. 'A world without values, never the same as our lost paradise!' protest their antithetical counterparts. A realistic balance seems impossible to attain. There seems a striking inability to give equal weight to idealism and disillusionment, and to overcome, either individually or as a group, the dichotomy of keeping an ethnic culture alive while also adopting the standards of a heterogeneous society and becoming integrated into it.

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[1] In line with latest scholarly work around theatre studies (Bottoms 2003; Knowles, Tompkins and Worthen 2003; Lennard and Luckhurtst 2002; Pickering 2010; Worthen 2008), I see 'theatre' as 'the complex of phenomena associated […] with the production and the communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems [e.g. codes of enunciation, gesture, embodiment, design and so on] underlying it' (Elam in Worthen 2008:12). I shall return to the implications of the interdependence, or 'interaction of these systems' (Worthen 2008), later. I also need to make the distinction between 'dramatic' and 'theatrical', where the former is taken to suggest 'the network of factors related to the represented dramatic text' (Elam 1997:2), and the latter is 'limited to what takes place between and among performers and spectators' (Elam 1997:2). And, finally, I employ the term 'playwright' when emphasising the dramatic dimensions of the discussion, and 'theatre practitioner' when its theatrical elements prevail.

[2] For a discussion of my understanding of community, see *Act I*, pp. 49-55; and *Conclusion*, pp. 272-4.

My study of Italian Canadian[3] theatre is not a case in point, but it does not represent a breakthrough either. Rather, it comes with its own criteria for literariness and ethnicity,[4] with the intention of representing what is taken to be a thematic reading of the plays it discusses. While contesting the reductive notion of 'immigrant experience,' this thesis will still deal with familiar themes of alienation and cultural conflict, but it will also acknowledge the complex role played by social, political, economic, and legal systems in the determination of Italian Canadian immigrant experiences in Canada. My primary defining element will be ethnic writing as a cultural activity by immigrants, and I will consequently identify the specifically Italian Canadian elements in the theatre they produced. The result will be the first coherent attempt at putting together a selective study of Italian Canadian theatre.

However academically restricted, cultural critique in the field of Italian Canadian studies has been explicit since the early 1980s. This is when the first consistent group of Italian immigrants, who left Italy as children to move to Canada with their families, started to graduate from Canadian universities,[5] creating academic associations and forums for discussion around Italian Canadian literature.[6] More particularly, the establishment of Guernica Editions (1978), the prominent Toronto-based publisher of works by ethnic intellectuals in North America, offered a place for

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[3] The parameters according to which the term is felt to be 'culturally correct' (Bagnell 1989; Chartier 2002; Harney 1986; Pivato 1985) will receive further consideration in the remainder of this *Introduction* and in *Act I* more particularly.

[4] I shall return to these in the methodological section of the *Introduction*. There has been a higher degree of antagonism towards the implications of a study of ethnic projects and their criteria of selection. See Eliades (1995:94); Golding (1995:chpt. 8); Gunew (1994:22-3); Huggan (2001:134-6); Kamboureli (1996:3); Longley (1992:166); Papaellinas (1991:xi).

[5] I shall return to this, in *Act II*, pp. 119-20.

[6] A distinction ought to be kept in mind between: (1) discourse produced primarily by non-Italians – usually from the disciplinary stance of ethnography, sociology, cultural anthropology, and urbanism, but also by journalists who assumed ideological, and even racialist (as the opening Act, particularly, will demonstrate), positions; and (2) discourse by Italian Canadians about themselves, usually from an ethnic position and concerned with self-exegesis. The latter occupies the majority of my secondary sources of this thesis, and supplies the privileged standpoint from which I consider the field of Italian Canadian studies in this *Introduction*.

those intellectuals to showcase their work. The proliferation of scholarly activities which immediately followed that period replicated a number of issues which exerted an impact on Italian Canadian critical discourse: an initial cultural isolation, the professionalisation of critical discourse, and the development of solid theoretical and academic corpora for a critical approach to works of literature (Bagnell 1989; Caccia 1982; Di Cicco 1978; Harney 1986; Pivato 1985; D'Alfonso 1988, 1990; Salvatore 1985). Consequently, having argued for a theoretical approach, it became possible for critics to engage more specifically with the primary texts and with those thematic similarities that seemed to have emerged from the heterogeneous Italian Canadian literary production to date (Boelhower 2001; D'Alfonso 1996, 1998; Minni, Ciampolini 1990; Pivato 1998, 1999; Pugliese 1999; Salvatore 1996, 1999; Tamburri 1998a; Verdicchio 1997).

The various forms in which critical discourse is presently configured revolve around what it means to be Italian Canadian in terms of ethnicity, showing how scholars in the field are continually engaged in cross- and inter-generational discursive dialogues with other critics, carrying on a process of critical agreement, imitation, modification, and subversion (Tamburri 2009; Verdicchio 2003). Out of these discursive dialogues, inventive and provocative articulations have also emerged, especially in relation to the primary texts (Caccia 2002; Gambino 2000; Loriggio 2003, 2004; Moyes and Canton 2003; Fratta and Nardout-Lafarge 2003; Pivato 2003; Scambray 2000). The essayists, like the poets, writers, and playwrights themselves, appear to have recognised the manifold difficulties of representing and singling out the distinctive culture[7] of ethnic groups (Pivato, 2012; Tamburri 2009; Verdicchio 2007; Viscusi 2006). In recent publications, particularly, intertextual, and interdisciplinary re-readings of novels and

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[7] For the purposes of this thesis, culture can be defined simply as 'a common set of social beliefs, values, traditions, and customs in any written and/or oral form' (D'Alfonso 1996:13). The term will include, but is not limited to, the culture of Italian immigrants or a member of an ethnic group living in Canada.

poetry collections have redefined Canada as a syncretic space that interrogates established narratives of identity and difference. Similarly, there is also a tendency to read Italian Canadian work as a means to move beyond self-identification as a significant pattern of cultural persistence and identity, thereby interpreting individual literary experience as a metonymy for the public and future destiny of a particular ethnic group in the global context (Caccia 2010).

In spite of the publication of a significant body of work on Italian Canadian literature over the last thirty years, interest in Italian Canadian theatre has always been limited, as documented by sociologist Sonia Floriani (2003) and comparatist Joseph Pivato (2012). Floriani observes that almost the totality of scholarly thinking surrounding Italian Canadian literature – nearly three hundred publications – is devoted to novels and poems with the exception of eight monographs and two articles dealing with play texts. Pivato (2012) reaches similar conclusions. One possible explanation for this can be found in the difficulty of accessing play texts, which is a destiny common to theatre work in general.[8] The mutual suspicion with which both literary studies and performance studies traditionally view each other should not be underestimated in the process either.[9] Significantly, however, the role played by the theatrical environment in

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[8] I shall return to this issue again in *Acts I*, *II*, and *III*. For more on the different processes involved in publishing a dramatic text see John Lennard and Mary Luckhurst, *The Drama Handbook* (2002: 9-11). In Canada, *Centre des auteurs dramatiques* (CEAD) represented the main repository of plays for theatre scholars and drama lovers up to the early 1980s. Since then, the growing interest in dramatic activities beyond the theatrical event itself (Ripley 1976; Rubin 1974:20) has resulted in the proliferation of publishing houses specialised in getting modern and contemporary plays into print. Thanks to the joint efforts of Playwrights Co-Op, Talonbooks, Guernica, New Press and Leméac, play texts are now readily available, but, except for Leméac, their reprinting has not become common practice yet.

[9] See the contributions of two Canadian scholars to this ongoing debate: Fortier's *Theory/Theatre* (1997:3-12) and Knowles, Tompkins and Worthen's *Modern Drama* (2003:vii-x, 29-48). Particularly, Ric Knowles's *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004), Mark Fortier's *Theory/Theatre* (1997), and Marvin Carlson's *Theatre Semiotics* (1990) successfully bring together heterogeneous scholars across performance and literary studies to both critique and defend the dramatic literature/performance juxtaposition. For them, it has been most often a question of going beyond Saussurian binarism and 'closure of representation' (Derrida 1967:341-68). However, while Knowles, Fortier and Carlson are all engaged in the kind of typologising theatre practitioners look for, I would argue that their respective studies are

Italian history, a history Italian immigrants proudly carried with them when they arrived

in Canada, has largely been ignored.

One of the outstanding hallmarks of culture within the Italian peninsula before

its process of unification beginning, in 1861, under the leadership of King Vittorio

Emanuele and the northern Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, was its regional

diversity, its conspicuous lack of homogeneity (Toniolo 2013:306).[10] Risorgimento

apologists strove to impose cultural unity as part of a justification for political unity

following 1870 (Toniolo 2013:308). The immense differences, even between

neighbouring cities, in formalistic cultural expression and its practical organisation,

while deriving in the first instance from geographic specificity, were fundamentally the

expression of the varied patterns of power politics (Smith 1997). The dense

implantation of dynastic courts in the north and the centre – Turin, Modena, Mantua,

Parma and Piacenza, Florence – generated different forms of cultural patronage from

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incapable of providing alternative routes for a truly well-rounded investigation of theatre. The dichotomy dramatic literature/performance is in itself extremely problematic, and I am perfectly aware that there is considerable debate around a rigorous separation of the two, ever since the publication, in 1962, of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, which became a foundational text 'for both speech act theory and, more broadly, the various critical debates surrounding the notion of performativity vs literary studies' (Bottoms 2003:180). Particularly, those who wish to keep dramatic literature and performance separate dwell on the semiotic provenance of such opposition, claiming that scholars like Elam (1987), Aston and Savona (1991), and Pavis (1996) see meaning as originating from the writer and, more than that, from the written text, which is regarded as 'the catalyst of criticism' (Fortier 1997:22). Not only is their view partial, failing to notice that theatre semioticians have always argued for the interdependence of drama and performance (Aston and Savona 1991; Elam 1987; Page 1992; Pavis 1996), but such critics also tend to overlook the fact that theatre semioticians are now in agreement that according privileged status to one system only is untenable (Pavis, 1996; Parker, Sedgwick 1995). Furthermore, ever since Schechner (1977) and the turn to performance studies in the 1970s, a polar opposite tendency can now be observed where critics like Lennard can go as far as to claim that 'for most dramatists written text is a by-product, necessary for production […] but secondary to what happens […] on stage' (Lennard and Luckhurst 2002:9). If the alternative to the semiotic approach is a materialist interpretation which seemingly sidesteps the dramatic text in order to exert a different control, that of the theatrical event, at the expense of the text, I wish to reject such positions firmly. Hence, this is ultimately the reason why I previously welcomed Knowles, Tompkins, and Worthen's use of 'theatre' as a syncretic term for my study (see 'note 1'). This term becomes more conducive to decentred authority than many definitions, suggesting that specific codes of enunciation can be heightened or diminished depending on how they are put into play in a given context.

[10] I shall return to this in *Act I*, pp. 73-4.

those of their republican neighbours, Venice, Genoa, and Lucca. A dramatically different form of the mixture of official court culture and unofficial elite culture was provided by the examples of Milan, Naples, and Palermo, all of which were ruled by foreign governors or viceroys, but all of which were socially structured by European royal families who sustained the arts over centuries regardless of the identity of their always-temporary ruler. The cultural patronage of papal Rome further testifies to the diversity of the Italian peninsula. The pope was the head of the Catholic Church, but he was also a temporal prince, and his pontifical patronage reflected the overlap between the worlds of politics and culture.

In such a fragmented context, a specific type of theatre, operatic theatre, assumed prime importance, being regarded even today as a paradigmatic example of Italian culture in the non-Italian world (Lennard and Luckhurst 2002; Pickering 2010). Opera had always provided a rare example of cultural unity in an otherwise fractured and particularist peninsula. However diverse the forms of Neapolitan opera developed from those of Venetian opera, and however slow expanding courts such as that of Turin were to adopt opera as the central form of entertainment, cultural historians (Gilmour 2011; Smith 1997; Pearce and Stiles 2006; Toniolo 2013) generally agree that there is a connection between the necessity to forge a supra-geographical and supra-historical national consciousness and the emergence of an operatic tradition in Italy at this time.

One fundamental reason for the importance of operatic theatre was its guiding principle of cultural combination. Operatic theatre was a collaborative effort and, as such, it implicitly challenged the notions of individual genius and expression which had been codified in the literary world in the nineteenth century (Arnold 1865, 1888; Coleridge 1817; Sainte-Beuve 1837). This collaboration was not simply aesthetic, it was cultural in the widest definition of the term. Opera drew on the abilities not only of

poets and musicians, but also painters and architects for scenery, scientists for stage machinery, classical scholars and historians for subject-matter, court officials for the practicalities of staging and for the incorporation of performance into festivals, and power-brokers, including the prince himself, who used the new genre for transparent political purposes. In the process, operas were transformed into cultural objects that inevitably partook of and reproduced the ideas circulating in the societies from which they originated. And, even though specific operas are still commonly associated with specific musicians, in the nineteenth century opera was the crossroads for most forms of cultural activity; however diverse the settings for its presentation and however much regional differences persisted, opera still managed to bring everyone to theatre, from the elite to the masses and from the north to the south.

In 1833, Giuseppe Mazzini, ideologue of the Risorgimento, identified opera as the art form most likely to unite Italy because of its ability to transcend the divisions of language in the peninsula, its representation through the operatic chorus of an idealised national community beyond region or class, and its powers of heroic arousal (Pearce and Stiles 2006). Giuseppe Verdi became the exemplary composer of the new romantic nationalism, and his name was painted on walls as an acronym for the political slogan of the Risorgimento: 'Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia' [=Vittorio Emanuele King of Italy]. The great choral lament of Hebrew slaves in captivity in Verdi's opera *Nabucco* became the signature tune of the movement. The recurrent themes of nineteenth-century Italian romantic opera – loyalty, conspiracy, revenge – colour Italian politics to this day, imbricated as they are within the Italian social system (Gilmour 2011; Toniolo 2013).

The move to create a distinctively Italian operatic theatre became part of an emerging Italian cultural identity, combining from the time of Verdi an interest in classic tragedy as a precursor for the ideal of a communal national theatre, which in turn

became central to Verdi's construction of a myth of origin for his own operatic works and those of his contemporaries (Harwood 2012). In Verdi's hands, operatic theatre was to offer a new mythology for an Italian national identity based on classical narratives of renunciation, sacrifice, purification, and redemption, themes that since the early nineteenth century had enjoyed an insidious potency within Italian cultural thought.[11] It is through operatic theatre that Italian national history has been mythologised, later becoming the fulcrum of Fascist Italy, where post-1947 Italian immigrants grew up. The fascist regime was active in support of the arts, particularly theatre. No composer or playwright had their work banned in an effort to help Italians to become prouder of their cultural history (Gilmour 2011:306, 310-2). Mussolini also favoured the establishment of cultural associations which allowed every Italian to enjoy sport and other recreations, with operas and plays playing an important part in his vision of a national Italian culture (Gilmour 2011:307). The affinity between Italians and the theatre had thus been firmly established long before the emergence of Italian Canadian theatre, which became instrumental in forging an ethnic identity among generations of Italian immigrants to Canada.

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[11] I am deliberately emptying the words 'renunciation', 'sacrifice', 'purification', and 'redemption' of their respective religious connotations here as I am not conforming to the post-war identification of 'religion in literature' with self-consciously doctrinal themes (Poster 1989). An important step in this study will be to deemphasise orthodox (that is to say, catechistic) expectations of what is believed to be 'Catholic' in Italian Canadian and Canadian arts and letters, i.e. the search for explicit and explicitly sympathetic discussions on the Church, on questions of theology and humankind (Hutcheon 1980; Pivato 2010). In so doing, I hope to return to a discussion of 'cultural practices' (Green 2008:32; Shaobo and Wang 2002). Cultural practices identify and investigate less-official versions of Catholicism, and less-self-conscious forms of Catholic creativity than inspirational verse or doctrinal narrative (Burke 2004; Green 2008; Shaobo and Wang 2002). In my thesis, this means identifying and investigating creative work that originate in Catholic childhoods, ways of being and knowing that sometimes contrast with the dictates of North American Protestantism. Moreover, at times, it may well mean acknowledging the indebtedness of Catholicism to classical literatures (especially Greek family narratives), neoclassicism, and Fascism, with its insistence on the sacred nature of family (see *Act I*, pp. 55-56; and *Conclusion*, pp. 272-3).

Figure 1. *Monumento a Little Italy*, **rue Saint-Zotique, Montréal (28 July 2011).**

As a form of cultural expression about (predominantly) Italian Canadians by Italian Canadians, the history of Italian Canadian theatre dates back only to 1951, four years after three events of great historic significance for hundreds of thousands of Italians, and for the future of Canada, took place in Ottawa. On February 10, 1947, Prime Minister Mackenzie King signed a peace treaty with Italy. Shortly afterwards, Italians were relieved of the distasteful wartime category of enemy aliens, and Italians with no relatives in Canada were permitted to apply for immigration. Then, early in April that same year, the government withdrew quota-law restrictions on immigration, allowing for indiscriminate entrance to Canada. And, finally, almost unremarked by anyone, in January 1948, the Canadian Embassy opened in Rome along with a small immigration office not far from St. Peter's Square. By the end of 1948, more than three thousand Italians had been admitted to Canada; by the end of the next year, that number had trebled, with Toronto and Montreal receiving the greatest percentage of Italian immigrants (Bagnell 1989; Harney 196; Salvatore 1999:40-2).

This is not to say that, prior to 1947, Italian immigration to Canada had been nonexistent. However, as the opening Act of my thesis will amply document, historical contingencies and socio-political factors impacted heavily on earlier definitions of 'Italian Canadian', to the extent that even the usage of the term 'Italian' was contested.

On the day Benito Mussolini declared war on Canada, 10th June 1940, anything to do with Italy suddenly became enemy propaganda. This is no mere figure of speech. Italian immigrants stopped speaking Italian in the street; Italian clubs, cultural institutes and schools were dismantled; and Italian cultural activities were strongly discouraged. Anti-Italian feelings and governmental concerns about Fascism affected the lives of Italian communities throughout Canada. This prejudice is debilitating for the activities of the historian trying to reconstruct the cultural history of Italian immigrants in Canada before the 1940s. Original archival material, normally held in the premises of the various Italian cultural institutes, was destroyed or disappeared, and cultural evidence of the earlier activities of these associations was compromised.

When Canada eventually reopened its doors to Italian immigrants in 1947, postbellum resentments were still alive, and prejudices were also expressed in its immigration bureaucracy's preference for the sturdy men of the industrialised north over the peasant men of the south. Post-war Italy was not, as generations of Canadians believed, full of 'desperate men and women with starvation in their eyes' (Allen and Russo 1997:12). Yet, in spite of its economic boom of the 1950s, Italy still remained a largely agrarian land, but too populous to live on agriculture. More importantly, it was a land in which boys grew into men believing their destiny lay elsewhere; emigration was in their history and in their hearts.

For many of those who went to Canada, Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was their first introduction to the new country. All of them brought little pieces of home with them: a favoured book or snapshot, or maybe some wine and recipes for breads, cheeses, and homemade salami or prosciutto. In addition to this were old pieces of Italian Fascist propaganda:

> Italy is not just a country. […] It is a civilisation – a culture admired and envied and imitated by the whole world. […] The Italian language was invented by

Italy's national poet Dante Alighieri. […] The Italian family is eternal. (Mussolini, 1936; translation mine)

This conspicuous set of symbols and beliefs that the early immigrants shared and continued to pass on to their children, elements that had no easy entry into their adopted country, filtered through Italian Canadian theatre. In its heyday more than ever, Italian Canadian theatre spoke to all those Italians who had come to Canada, celebrating their history and culture by bringing to the fore their mythology and folklore from the past. As the vast majority of Italian immigrants went to live in Toronto and Montreal,[12] their theatre was an urban product reflecting their daily lives as immigrants in Canada's two largest cities.

The accolade of first Italian Canadian playwright goes to Bruno Mesaglio, who, in 1951, set up a drama club in Toronto's Little Italy, known as Il Piccolo Teatro Canadese di Toronto, creating Italian comedies and short plays to be performed in English and Italiese, the language spoken by Italian Canadians within the Italian Canadian community of Toronto. Having realised an opportunity to combine his passion for theatre with his work within Toronto's Little Italy, Mesaglio marked the beginning of community-based Italian Canadian theatricals which would dominate Italian Canadian theatre up to the late 1970s. In part, Mesaglio's idea was the consequence of a self-conscious drive to build the Piccolo Teatro's theatrical identity, to discover in theatrical terms the various things that made Italian Canadians distinctive beyond the socio-political badge of their immigrant state. This search was based on Italian and European aesthetic traditions which embraced Commedia dell'Arte, Venetian and Neapolitan comedies, and cabaret. The central aim of this quest was to transport the heritage of the Italian homeland to Canada.

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[12] See *Act I*, pp. 65, 69-72.

Mesaglio's influence and initiative would rub off later on two other seminal theatre practitioners, Amilcare Zanini (1928–1972) and Agostino Venier (1920–1969), writing in Italiase and Italian dialect for their respective Little Italies in Toronto and Montreal. Zanini's and Venier's were social dramas and satirical comedies centred on Commedia dell'Arte farces, the standard European melodramas, cabaret, and the *macchietta* [skit]. The Italian Canadian communities of these two cities offered the subject matter for original plays written by Italian immigrant playwrights, which were often based on the scandalous headline or gossip of the day from within those cities' Little Italies. This gossip also provided clues as to the social communities and business roles pursued by Italian Canadians of the period.

For this kind of historical recovery, playbills and interviews with the playwright's relatives are the best – sometimes the only – way to discover not only what was being performed, but how it was received by the people who witnessed it. As Mesaglio's daughter put it in my interview: '[Italian Canadian theatre] was a delight to the eyes as much as the hearts, working on the axiom that theatre has to be felt.' (22 July 2011)[13]

From the early 1970s, with the introduction of a series of multicultural policies, Italian Canadian theatre began a more overt dialogue with Canada. A concept born of bilingualism,[14] multiculturalism was initially a political term employed by bureaucrats which gradually evolved into an official recognition that a variety of ethnic groups existed within Canada's borders who had specific needs and concerns that the government should address (Stratton and Ang 1994). The shift from Canada's self-imagining as a colony in which primary importance was placed on being racially

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[13] Part of this thesis makes use of notes and transcriptions of informal interviews I conducted with prominent Italian Canadian playwrights, their relatives, and Italian Canadians residing in Toronto and Montreal. These interviews took place over the months of October 2009, July 2011, and August 2013. I have incorporated some extracts into the main body of the thesis.

[14] I shall return to this, on pp. 16, 23-4, and in *Act II*.

uniform to the valuing and prioritisation of ethnic diversity arguably came only with the establishment of multicultural policy. In 1982, multiculturalism was officially adopted into Canada's constitution in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill C-93, the official Multiculturalism Act, followed. The government's aim was to lead its citizens towards the integration of ethnic groups into society. By accepting that many immigrants would visibly and proudly express their ethnic identity, and by imposing an obligation on the part of public institutions (the police, schools, media, museums, etc.) to accommodate these ethnic identities, a proliferation of cultural activities by Canada's ethnic communities ensued. A multicultural programme was also established to sponsor ethnic cultural projects.

Tony Nardi (1951-) became the first playwright to benefit from this programme, but a surprising number of other intellectuals also emerged: poets, novelists, and essayists, who had left Italy in their childhood, had grown up in Toronto's and Montreal's Little Italies, and now wrote their work in one of the official languages of Canada.[15] Theatrically, it was heartening to see, shortly after the performance of Tony Nardi's first multicultural Italian Canadian play, *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979), that the themes that interested him also permeated the work of two other Italian Canadians, Marco Micone (1947-) and Caterina Edwards (1948). In their plays, Nardi, Micone, and Edwards all describe the dislocation caused by immigration, the sacrifices of parents for children, and the pressures of growing up Italian in a new culture that was becoming highly secular and materialistic. 'Only after writing *La Storia*,' Nardi once told an interviewer in an issue of the *Eyetalian Magazine*,[16] 'did I see that there were a few others writing about the same themes. I was as isolated as anyone. It was a pleasant surprise, as if I discovered a few others on the lifeboat with me.' (1994:23) The multicultural programme allowed Italian Canadian theatre to leave the immediate

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[15] I shall return to this, in *Act II*, pp. 119-20.
[16] See *Act III*, p. 198.

vicinity of the Italian Canadian communities from which it had emerged in the 1950s. Its major exponents shared their experiences, working independently yet with a common purpose: to define for themselves and others what it meant to be Italian in Canada in the last half of the twentieth century. In several ways, these theatre practitioners represented an entirely new, third presence among Canadian intellectuals – not English, not French, but affected by both.

Marco Micone arrived in Montreal with his parents from southern Italy when he was eleven in the late Fifties. His plays, first written and performed in French, dramatised the pain of trying to adapt to a new country while the heart longed for the old one. The best known of these, *Gens du silence* (1982), deals with an immigrant family whose members are depicted in almost tragic terms, as victims of an inevitable tide of history over which they have no control, but which determines their empty destiny. Beneath the shade of the trees in his backyard in Montreal, Micone spoke to Italian Canadian writer Fulvio Caccia of the immigration experiences of his parents' generation:

> Some people have seen my plays as making the immigrant from Italy entirely a victim. I do believe that immigration has been a great hardship, but in each of my plays there is someone who rises above it all, who prevails, who is not defeated. Immigration has made them something else. You know, it is probably not even right to refer to Italians in Canada as Italians. Whatever they are, they are *not* Italian. (1998:187)

This quotation offers as good an insight as any into Italian Canadian theatre as a product of migration and its eclectic subject matter, which is composed of fragments of memory, identity, and experience.

Seen in this light, Italian Canadian theatre is still performed in present-day Canada, mostly outside the multicultural programme which was discontinued in 1988. For example, the plays by Mary Melfi (1951-), Claudio Cinelli (1958-), and Carlo Chiarilli (1960-) now pledge no exclusive or predominant allegiance to a particular country. Instead, their references and practices have taken complex and diverse feelings

that belong to different groups stretching across a number of places: Canada, the United States, Europe, South America.

II

Is the search for identity the only *raison d'être* for theatre practised by Italian Canadians? Certainly, 'identity' has been the almost inevitable sub-text of Italian Canadian and other ethnic theatres in Canada. I say 'inevitable,' however, with qualification: for had Canada not been racially conscious, and had Italian Canadians been perceived as an integral part of the theatre resource of the host country from its outset, then perhaps there would have been no impulse to seek self-identification through the theatre. Sadly, this was not the case in the 1950s, nor, as Acts II and III of this thesis will argue, is it the case now.

It is difficult to explain the persistence of ethnic identity in Canada. Theoretically, though, there are several springboards from which to leap into a discussion of ethnicisation. In a settler society, British culture remained a provisional source of ethnicity until Canada began its quest for its own national identity. When questions of nationalism arose after the passing of the 1947 *Canadian Citizenship Act* and were exacerbated over the next two decades through factors such as post-World War II immigration, Quebec nationalism, fear of American imperialism, and growing demands from peoples of the First Nations, the emphasis on the concept of ethnicity in Canada necessarily shifted.

When examined from a legal standpoint, ethnicity has distinct, both tenable and malleable, parameters. For example, one need look no further than the 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and Prime Minister Trudeau's declaration of official multiculturalism in 1971, to understand how Canada's identity is influenced by its cultural mosaic.

Before explaining the enduring vision of Canada as a pluralist society, it is necessary to understand the terms 'integration', 'assimilation' and 'acculturation' as defined by the Royal Commission. According to its Report:

> Integration, in the broad sense, does not imply the loss of an individual's identity and original characteristics or of his original language and culture. […] Integration is not synonymous with assimilation. Assimilation implies almost total absorption into another linguistic or cultural group. An assimilated individual gives up his cultural identity, and may even go so far as to change his name. Both integration and assimilation occur in Canada, and the individual must be free to choose whichever process suits him, but it seems to us that those of other than French or British origin clearly prefer integration. The process of integration goes hand in hand with what anthropologists call "acculturation." Anyone who chooses Canada as his adopted country adopts a new style of life, a particular kind of existence [...] Acculturation is the process of adaptation to the environment in which an individual is compelled to live as he adjusts his behaviour to that of the community. Acculturation is inevitable in a multi-ethnic country like Canada, and the two main societies themselves are open to its influence. (1967)

While the Royal Commission was a response to the viability of 'deux nations' [two nations] and the threat of Quebec nationalism, it gave non-Charter groups the impetus to aspire to cultural preservation as a constitutional right. Pierre Trudeau institutionalised ethnicity in 1971 by officially declaring Canada a multicultural nation; and in 1982 the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms affirmed multiculturalism as a factor determining the character of Canadian society.

Notwithstanding the legal underpinnings of ethnicisation and ethnic identity, until three decades ago Anglo-Franco conformity was demanded of immigrants. Remarkably, few ever publicly questioned the morality of conformism (Stratton and Ang 1998). Implicit to the Report is the assumption that whatever choice immigrants might make, the force of ethnicity would dissipate over time. The terms only measure the rate of dissipation. Whether deliberately negligent or merely short-sighted, the Commission ignored both the primordial character of ethnicity and the ascribed ethnicisation of immigrants. Just as in Canada's nation-building era, the subtle demand for conformism is evident in the report.

Others saw demands for recognition of ethnicity and multiculturalism as wrong-minded (Berry 1984; Koopmans et al. 2005; Porter 1979). Wary of demands for recognition of ethnicity, sociologists Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka concluded that ethnic identity and cohesion persisted as a response to economic separation (2010). As an outsider, the ethnic subject is aware of barriers and his inability to move beyond them; these barriers are then perpetuated by the value placed on ethnic differentiation by both charter and ethnic groups. In 2009 sociologist Jeff Reitz summarised the issue as follows:

> In other words, the Canadian mosaic was actually a means of ethnic exploitation. Anglo-Saxon celebration of ethnicity, according to this perspective, is self-serving in that it was an attempt to maintain British supremacy and, only as an unintended consequence, assured the survival of non-British, non-French cultures in Canada. (161)

Essentially, policy suffices to a limited degree in understanding the scope and breadth of ethnicisation; what it does shed light on is the inherent aversion to ethnic persistence as a means of individual self-actualisation for Canadians and, consequently, a vehicle for creating a nation distinct from its British roots.

In this sense, underlying any analysis of ethnicity in Canada is an understanding of the concept of ethnic differentiation, the process by which ethnicities have adapted to existing in Canada. For each ethnic group, the process of differentiation is unique in form and practice. Significant to this understanding is a consideration of the extent to which living in Canada has determined for its ethnic groups the strength and nature of its ethnic character (Liebkind 2001; Padolsky 1997; Phinney 1987, 1990). Theoretically, ethnic adaptation can be measured in terms which are quite similar to those in the 1963 Commission Report, on a continuum ranging from ethnic group separation to integration, then assimilation. Ethnic group separation is the development and maintenance of cultural boundaries and mechanisms that aim at retaining as much social and physical distance as possible between the ethnic group and others in Canada (Porter

1979). Integration involves a temporary participation by ethnic subjects in the host society's institutions, without compromising their loyalty to their ethnic community (Berry 1990, 1997). Frideres states that integration involves both the frequency and the intensity of 'ties with their surroundings that the individual or group maintains over time.' (2008:81) He then hypothesises that integration is the outcome of two sets of forces: host society institutions and attitudes, and the social and human capital of the immigrants (Biles et al. 2008:83). As the ties that define integration are multidimensional and complex, they can be measured in various areas (economic, social, cultural, political) according to various indicators such as membership in voluntary associations, feelings of belonging, intermarriage rates, residential segregation, and so on in each area (Biles et al. 2008:275). Assimilation is the process by which members of an ethnic group assume the culture of the dominant group (Igoa 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In Canada, ethnic continuity has involved negotiation between the desire to maintain heritage and common identity, and the need selectively to integrate with the host community.

III

Invaluable to any study of the Italians of North America is the research done by Robert Harney in 1986.[17] Central to his study is the examination of the problems in Italian Canadians' perception of their role in civilising the Western hemisphere. Harney

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[17] While much of the research on Italian immigration to North America has been driven by the United States (Gambino 2000; Loriggio 2004; Tamburri 1998a), similar conclusions cannot be drawn for Italian Canadian ethnicity. In their 1994 study on ethnicity and Canadian children of Italian descent, James Cameron and Richard Lalonde suggest that at least two factors argue against the applicability of American research to Canada. First, their study, as indeed the bulk of generational studies on ethnic identity, focuses on historical data: Italian immigration to Canada is far more recent, which impacts on cross-generational patterns when discussing ethnicity (Tamburri 2009). Second, Canada's policy of multiculturalism encourages the maintenance of ethnic heritage and language unlike the prevailing assimilationist attitudes in the US (prior to Obama).

notes an immigrant manipulation of the past to create a narrative present modelled on old stock from the British Isles who assert privilege based on historical contribution and longevity. In Canada the problem lies in the concept of the founding nations. Harney uses Frantz Fanon's analysis of the passionate need for the Italian intelligentsia to discover Italian heroes in the history of the civilisation of North America to prove a status equal to the founding peoples. Fanon observed that native and ethnic intellectuals often harbour a secret hope of discovering an enchanted era existing in a time beyond their present self-contempt, which will redeem them from their self-perception (and that of others) as immigrants occupying the lower layers of society (1963:69-71). This has led to a search for Italianness created by artists, warriors, and explorers of Italian descent: hence, 'John Cabot is reclaimed as Giovanni Caboto, General Bourlamaque as Burlamacchi, and Father Bressan as Bressani' (Pivato in Di Giovanni 1984:13; Stellini 1999:165-72).

Crucial to understanding this phenomenon, and the force of ethnic identification as a whole, is recognising the dangerous false consciousness that evolves from the separation of 'pioneering' Italians from the 'lesser' immigrants. In turn, this upsets the image of the ethnic subject as a foreign other, working against the ideology of official multiculturalism that defines the ethnic subject by strategically privileging its origins outside Canada. The issue at stake here is that of regarding ethnic subjectivity as something to be domesticated, not because it has been appropriated by state policies, but rather because of its continuous historic presence. Ethnicity is then rethought as a 'naturalised' presence. This is accomplished by reconceptualising historical temporality – the now and then of Canadian history that Italian Canadians claim as theirs. In so doing, they attempt to strengthen their ethnicity in Canada by announcing their presence before its official standpoint in 1963.

Conversely, Harney notes reluctance among scholars of Italians in North America to acknowledge the history of the poor (1986:12). This discomfort can translate into ethnic self-disesteem. The ensuing ethnic inferiority complex is offset by focusing on the greatness that was Italy. The intersection of ethnic uses of history distorts the perception of the real history of those Italian immigrants who came to Canada after 1947. By creating a surrogate history, recognition of the immigrants' human dignity and their triumph over the frontiers bordering the immigrant world is neglected. In the end, glorification of a few individuals does not foster legitimate ethnic pride; instead, it only makes for negligent history.

Poet and essayist Antonio D'Alfonso characterises the process of ethnicisation of Italians in Canada as a consequence of two factors: personal choice and ascription (1996). He contends that Canada never transformed its immigrants into a new and superior race (26), and his approach to multiculturalism is less polemical than Harney's. Indeed, for D'Alfonso, the introduction of Canada's policies of multiculturalism opened further possibilities for ethnic groups to retain their heritage and language. This suggests that ethnic identity is simultaneously valued at both the institutional level and at a more private one, with family, friends, and the ethnic group. Hence, D'Alfonso appears to see ethnic identity as something to be maintained, pursued or transformed through public, interpersonal, or intergroup relations.

Immigrant groups arrived from Italy as disjointed fragments of the old world (Guarracino 2012).[18] In the new world they became ethnic subjects. They built group linkages thanks to chain migration,[19] and on the basis of shared cultural symbols such as common origin or regional identity, language, or a shared religion. In the online *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, sociologist Franc Sturino, describing Italian Canadians, differentiates between examples of personal cultural transmission which

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[18] See *Act I*, p. 63.
[19] I shall return to this, on p. 68, *Act I.*

'reflected local, regional, and national attributes, both in Italy and in Canada', and 'formal transmission', which 'has been accomplished through the church, the media, and a myriad of associations, from clubs to theatre groups.' (1999) However, while language (mostly dialect) served to unite some groups, others were united by religion or their folk culture. The inconsistency at the heart of ethnic unity led D'Alfonso to conclude that common feelings of identity also stemmed from other factors (1996:129).

Primarily, the ascriptions set down by outsiders became broadly accepted by the media, the public, and ultimately the immigrants themselves (D'Alfonso 1996). Broad categories were used by outsiders in classifying the Italian foreigner. For instance, rather than distinguishing immigrants by village identities as they might have done themselves, outsiders used larger or natural designations (Loriggio 1996; Salvatore 1999). There was no trouble taken to distinguish a Sicilian from a Friulan; rather, two disparate identities were grouped under the common label of 'Italian' (Viscusi in Loriggio 1996:62).

According to cultural historian Francesco Loriggio (1996), Italian immigrants also found it just as necessary to use broad categories like 'Italian' when dealing with the host country. A broader scheme for classification was unavoidable, for it proved impossible for any person to cope with all the complexities ethnic identities entail; not granted the leisure to create their own identity, the newcomers found it in large part fashioned for them. As a consequence, D'Alfonso (1996) found that ethnic personality could be differentiated from ethnic identity. While the former is an inductive generalisation from behavioural data, the latter is the product of self-definition and the views of the host society. Although cultural traits remain more consistent than human perceptions, ethnic identity is more quickly affected by new conditions than ethnic personality:

> Ultimately, the two converge. In the case of the immigrants to North America, an appellation like Irish or Italian or German became their ascribed identity. The self-identity for many was a village identity. (Loriggio 1996:128)

When immigrants cast off home town loyalties and viewed themselves in terms of broad national groupings intelligible to outsiders, then the two dimensions were merged. The 'immigrants' had become 'ethnics'.

IV

As noted earlier, the main motive for Italian immigrants in coming to Canada was not to actualise their Italian identity. 'The [Italian] immigrants came to Canada to work' is the lapidary statement with which Frank Paci's novel, *The Italians* (1978), begins. Similarly, becoming a 'Canadian' was not their main concern either. The pressure of ethnicisation left little time for them to even consider the implications of using the umbrella term 'Canadian' when referring to the identity they acquired in their host country, let alone its many possible declensions:

> Nobody told us there was two America: the real one, United States, and the fake one, Canada. Then, to make matter even worse, there's two Canada: the real one, Ontario, and the fake one, Quebec. (*Mambo Italiano* 2003) [20]

Angelo Persichilli amplifies this point in an article he published after the Chrétien Liberals announced a revamped multicultural policy in 1996:

> The participants must have seemed like a team of doctors gathered around an empty operating table, with the patient waiting outside [...] The meeting was attended by representatives of native cultural groups, Francophone groups and Anglophone groups (I beg your pardon, Canadians). What about us? Don't worry: the Minister for Multiculturalism has already called for a meeting prior to the next

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[20] The study of Canadian identity has a history of provoking 'is there?' questions. The paradoxical power of 'is there?' goes beyond the rhetorical trope of being both the question and the answer. While seemingly an expression of hilarity, doubt, and scepticism, the question brings into existence, as a meaningful subject of debate, that which it ostensibly challenges: is there a Canadian identity? And if so, how does one mark something as distinctively 'Canadian'? As Robert Kroetsch put it in *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (1989): 'Canadians do not ask who they are. They ask, rather, if they are' (p. 55). This idea is not new; it is only the tip of an iceberg, just another reference to the 'lingering suspicion in the Canadian psyche that Canada is a historical accident' (Morrison 2003:60).

election. The order of the day will be to decide whether to adopt the *tarantella* [traditional Neapolitan folk dance] as the national anthem. (1997:2)

Even when they resorted to caricature, Italians became Canadian in their own ways and on their own terms. They used 'Canadian' as a safety blanket to pin down their belonging to a nation in geographical terms. However, as with the 'Italian' side of their ethnic label, the decisions they made to either escape, deny, defend, embrace, or selectively identify with Canadianness remained highly personal.

Again, ascriptions set down by Canadian history cannot be overlooked here. In the Canada in which post-1947 Italian immigrants landed, immigration's ontological rift was compounded by a sociological one; immigrants were torn not only between their various Italian identities, but also between two distinct formations of being 'Canadian' drawn along ethnolinguistic lines: French and English. Already dispossessed of a tangible origin, stranded between becoming other and remaining what they were, Italian immigrants were enjoined to reinvent themselves as either French or English. Each language revealed different ways of belonging to a culture, and to a society, determining a place on the economic and social scale (Salvatore 1999).

Even so, an Anglo-Canadian vision of Canada dominated the country's political and social landscape well into the post-war period, having developed in the context of the British Empire much earlier, from the events leading up to Canadian Confederation in 1867. The eventual repatriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982 confirmed Canada as a self-standing, multicultural nation, with its own independent legislation and social history. The love-hate relationship with the United States also played an important factor in all of this, in both positive and negative ways, encompassing economics, politics, and culture, and consolidating Canada's identity as something distinct and self-protective.[21]

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[21] Siemerling summarises this attitude quite well: '[t]he frequently mentioned United States melting pot has often helped to articulate an opposing Canadian "identity" founded on the

Italian immigrants never actively participated in Anglo-Canadian nationalism,..[22] though their preferred enabling tool for expression was English. In Toronto the language of education was inevitably English. In Montreal they would generally opt for an education in English for their Italian- and Canadian-born children until this possibility was definitively removed in public schools with the introduction of the Charter of the French Language, Bill 101, in 1977, following the election of the *Parti Québécois* in 1976. With this came the realisation in Quebec that a polarised education system which made immigrants assimilate with the Anglophones was suicidal for a region whose economic productivity and growth depended on immigration (Losacco 2003). After Bill 101 was made the law of the land, it was decided that the newly created 'allophone group'[23] in Quebec would be educated in French alongside the Francophone one, and suddenly all immigrant children, Italians among them, were obliged to attend French schools. The public and legal protests launched by the Italian immigrants were vehement (L'Orfano 2013) and exacerbated by a similar episode, ten years earlier in Montreal, known as the St Léonard crisis.

On that occasion, school commissioners in the area made the decision to end the provision of bilingual classes, replacing them with monolingual French ones. The protests prompted a variety of statements from prominent figures within and outside Quebec. Premier Daniel Johnson 'promised that English-speaking Quebecers would never be forced to integrate their schools with those of French-speaking [ones]'

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rejection of such a homogenizing principle; yet the more recent developments to have influenced Canadian discussions are, on the contrary, due to the fact that emphasis on unconditional assimilation in the United States has given way for quite some time now to a widespread acceptance and endorsement of neoethnic attitudes modelled […] on the more radical positions that developed out of the civil rights movement in terms of race and subsequently of gender (1996:10). For more on Canada-US relationships, see *Act III*, 'note 14'.

[22] For more on the status and prestige of the English language in North America, with a special focus on Canada, see Larrivée (2003) and Bourhis (1984).

[23] The 'allophone' designation, first used in the 1972 Gendron Report on the language question, situates immigrants whose native language is neither French nor English as simply 'other'. According to Molinaro: 'The term ''allophone'' gives to immigrants and their descendants a characteristic definition denuded of all content and reference apart from the opposition English and French' (1999:116).

(*Montreal Gazette* 1968:A1). Wilder Penfield, renowned McGill University pyschiatrist, in his comments 'on the suburban St. Leonard controversy over bilingual schools' remarked that 'the 'bilingual brain' is a superior instrument and all Canadian parents have the right to demand bilingual education for their children' (*Montreal Gazette* 1968:A3). René Lévesque – soon to be Canada's 23rd Prime Minister – declared that the 'rights of English speaking residents should be respected,' but then delivered on what he promised by adding that 'starting at some future date, Quebec will provide funds to support only French-language schools for immigrants' (*Montreal Gazette* 1968:A4).

When Bill 101 was passed, Italian immigrants residing in Montreal felt betrayed. At that point, a government policy was effectively removing from those who had settled in Quebec the freedom of choice in the education of their children. This had a profound impact on consolidating Italian immigrants' preference for Anglo-Canada, with Bill 101 leading to the exodus of at least 350,000 individuals, most of them Italian immigrants who left Montreal for Toronto. Yet in a country like Canada, where cultural duality is clearly prevalent in spite of its configuration as a cultural mosaic, one can never simply ask whether one feels part of this group or that one and expect to receive a definitive answer. As noted above, self-identification also involves a significant pattern of cultural persistence and identity. Concurrently, recent migration patterns and the turn to globalisation of both Anglo-Canada and Quebec affected Italian Canadians in similar ways, as the concluding part of this thesis will demonstrate. All the same, social trends in Italian Canadian communities across Canada continue to show the tenacity of the term 'Italian Canadian' (Esposito 1993a; Floriani 2003; Santucci 2010), regardless of whether Italian immigrants are Anglophone, Francophone, or both.

It is in this spirit that I would like to turn to the central term of this thesis: 'Italian Canadian'. Stylistic uniformity aside, I had originally considered taking the risk

of preserving all three of the different punctuations currently used in Italian Canadian studies: Italian-Canadian, Italian/Canadian, Italian Canadian, with the latter being the most neutral and politically correct form (D'Alfonso 1996; De Santis and Gatto-White 2013; Floriani 2003; Losacco 2003), whereas the first two variations tend to be charged with polemical associations (D'Alfonso 1996, 1998; Loriggio 2003, 2004; Salvatore 1999; Scambray 2000). Some scholars have even introduced a fourth variant, ~~Italian Canadian~~, to designate the bracketed or erased identity – the 'weak ethnicity' – of the contemporary period (Santucci 2010). That scholars are equally divided over the punctuation of the term is a clear indication that the designation is itself under question and in flux within Italian Canadian culture at large (Gambino 2000; Pivato 1985, 2012; Scambray 2000; Tamburri 1998a, 1998b). The marking or unmarking of the term is, in effect, a declaration of one's attitude towards ethnic self-identification, a manifesto by which difference or sameness is announced. The ambivalence of the term, as reflected in scholars' refusal to come to a consensus, is emblematic of present issues surrounding Italian Canadian identity, which is far removed from its first terminological designation as New-Canadian or Neo-Québécois, terms later to be rejected as signs of colonialism.[24]

Although the traditional term Italian-Canadian is the most proper grammatical form, grammatical correctness often hides ideological impropriety. In 1996, for example, in Pivato's pioneering online platform about 'Italian-Canadian writing', it is problematic because it foregrounds the status of Italian-Canadians as *hyphenated* Canadians. The hyphen, negatively construed, is a graphic marker of a fractured and

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[24] Both terms seemingly presuppose a binary opposition between those who are naturally entitled to an identity, and ethnic groups, on whom the right is reserved to bestow a 'new' identity (Chartier 2002, 2003; *Montreal Gazette* 1968:A7; Pivato 2012). I also refuse to employ the expression 'Italian American,' for the term primarily identifies Italian immigrants and individuals of Italian descent who reside in the United States (Gambino 2000; Loriggio 2004; Tamburri 1998a).

incomplete identity, not necessarily the sign of a rich bicultural self.[25] On the other hand, Italian/Canadian, a usage advocated by Anthony Tamburri (1998b) – to whom this discussion is greatly indebted – and employed polemically by some contributors to the debate around Italian Canadian studies, introduces the aggressive mark of the slash that activates the contradictions at work in the hybrid identity of the Italian/Canadian, thereby effecting a radical disturbance in the traditional equations and nominal identities such equations announce: Italian = Canadian (the unity of the assimilated self); Italian - Canadian (the separation and disjunction of the culturally divided or hyphenated self); Italian + Canadian (the balance of the self enhanced by acculturation.) The use of Italian Canadian removes the minus sign of the hyphen, neutralising the fracturing effect of the hyphen and introducing in its place a gap that maintains a respectful silence. It is important, therefore, that the reader should recognise that my usage of the term Italian Canadian in this thesis marks a terminological conflict and that the gap between the two terms ought to be read as a full sign – not an empty or insignificant blank – that activates and keeps in play all the terminological options discussed above.

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[25] For a reading of the hyphen as positive mark, see Moyes and Canton (2004); and Simon (1985).

Note on methodology

As will be the case throughout this thesis, my methodology is responsive to the demands of particular theatre works which put the emergence of Italian Canadian communities in conversation with the development of specific forms of Italian Canadian theatre. More particularly, I take a case-study approach whose end product consists of three chapters, 'Acts', with selective contextual elements. The three case studies are looked at in depth, their contexts scrutinised, and their ordinary activities detailed, with the specific and the general remaining closely intertwined. Terminological, historical, and methodological issues are given more weight in the single chapters, which address my theoretical engagement concomitantly with my qualitative research. In so doing, I put my qualitative theatre research into conversation with other disciplines such as drama, ethnography, and cultural studies, without proceeding from any one governing theoretical position, or at least not explicitly.[26] Importantly, because this study is also the first attempt at putting together a selective study of Italian Canadian theatre, its basis remains empirical, with its historical/chronological, ideological, and thematic presuppositions always receiving due caution and necessary critical reserve.

The thesis's broadly chronological approach relates to the organisational principles around which its history is structured. 'Always historicise!' (1981:11) is Fredric Jameson's celebrated call to arms. However, in the Italian Canadian context, as Harney indicates, the comment is somewhat redundant, for it is almost impossible not to

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[26] In line with cultural studies, cultural history challenges older models of social history by questioning the shaping force of narrative in history, forcing it to deal with 'low' as well as 'high' cultural sources and, in a related way, to think harder about the ways certain agents of history (for example the masses, women, colonised or, in this specific thesis, theatre practices by Italian immigrants and Italian Canadians) had been rendered anonymous in conventional history-writing (Poster 1989). This approach to primary sources is markedly interdisciplinary and situates its object of study within a network of signifiers which include cultural, historical, psychological, political, legal, and other modes of knowledge. It also aims to explore how traditionally neglected cultural sources affirm adopted or repudiated norms and properties, with whatever degree of anxiety.

feel the force of history everywhere in Italian Canadian culture (1986:4). So pervasive is history's presence that it produces striking, even extreme, responses, as for instance with Mary Melfi in the closing *Act* of this study,[27] for whom history represents not the wisdom of the ancient world but a nightmare from which she is trying to awake. The real issue is not Jameson's injunction to historicise, but the need to devise a sensitive framework that is not overwhelmed by history and does not assume that the task is finished when Italian Canadian theatre practices are recuperated from the historical past; a framework, in other words, which makes sense of both legacy and reciprocity in Italian Canadians' relationship with their host country.

From Jameson's approach, I derive the temporal subdivision of the three 'Acts' of my study. Yet this subdivision only provides 'macrostructures' (Perkins 1995:7; Williams 1976:125).[28] I reject those attitudes that look at theatre monographs in terms of fixed, patterned histories. As important as Canadian and Italian socio-historical contexts are to this study, I am ultimately more interested in how those contexts shaped what happened and in interpreting my qualitative data in such a way that it connects to larger issues. This has two important consequences. The first is that even while the three 'Acts' will feature a thorough socio-historical context, I do not have the aim here of writing a 'history' of Italian Canadian theatre. Everything I say about history is meant purely to provide the information necessary for interpreting its creative, social, and political dynamics. Importantly, this is also to be distinguished from a full ethnography of Italian Canadians. Ethnography is both a process (ethnographic methods of studying culture and context) and a product (the written product of such a study). The ethnography of Italian Canadians in this thesis's title refers to the first rather than the

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[27] See *Act III*, pp. 222-3.
[28] Raymond Williams uses the term 'macrostructures', which he borrows from economics, to discuss large-scale contextual references to events featuring, for instance, social groups, organizations, institutions, and nation-states (Williams 1976:125). Perkins advises a vigilant usage of the word that leaves space for individuals whose gender, race, and social status might not correspond to the common interests of all people who live in a community (Perkins 1995:7).

second of these. I draw on the research strategies of ethnography, but the product is not meant to be a full-fledged ethnography of any of the varied cultural contexts of Italian Canadian theatre.

I also disavow developmental approaches to theatre and content, denying the linearity of history and the attendant concept of a progressive history (Brennan 1997; Carter 1987; Guillory 1993; Perkins 1992). Godzich deliberately opposes '*emergent* literatures' to the often used Hegelian expression, '*emerging* literatures', a concept which traditionally[29] sees 'new literatures' as 'less-mature states of canonical literatures' (1988:27; emphasis mine). 'Emergent literatures' and 'emerging literatures', contrary to what might seem a trivial play on words, rely on two completely different epistemological presuppositions. Siemerling insists on the concept of 'emergent literatures' as 'incomplete' histories, with their 'curious ironies […] and contradictions' (2005:2). This framework contrasts with the principles of linear continuity fostered by developmental models, which clearly feed on Hegelian idealism and the Darwinian model of evolution. Ever since the Enlightenment, theatre histories have predominantly been seen as objective, progressive, and deterministic. In accordance with Hegel's and Darwin's imprint, their narratives could only lead to progress, while the collection of reliable, 'objective' historical facts was assumed to reveal the one true story of the specific past being analysed.

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[29] In the arena of comparative literatures (and theatre studies, as the final sub-section of this introduction will point out) 'emerging literatures' enjoyed relative if short-lived popularity. In fact, to date there have only been two theoretical studies on this field – both of which were written during the same period as Godzich's: Claudio Guillén's 1990 *Emerging Literatures: Critical Questionings of a Historical Concept* and Jean-Marie Grassin's 1996 'Emerging Literatures', from the proceedings of the *XI Congress of the ICLA: International Comparative Literature Association*. Other theoretical uses of the notion 'emerging literatures' occur in Commonwealth studies and/or are applied to Australian literatures. This general bibliographic overview is complemented by the only specialised dictionary that I am aware of which includes a specific entry to this subject: the Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires / International Dictionary of Literary Terms (<http://www.ditl.info/>).Scholarly activity around 'emerging literatures' is not at stake here; instead, what I focus on here is how emerging literatures have been conceptualised as a suspect category by Godzich.

Godzich's and Siemerling's desires to unearth multiple pasts undermines this view, which reigned uncontested until the early 1990s (Guillén 1990). Godzich in particular contends that literary histories are not told from A to Z anymore:

> [E]mergent literatures are that large body of 'new' literatures from emergent cultures […] They confound any attempt to contain the diversity and multifariousness of the [literary/cultural] phenomena they examine within the reassuring parameters of a unified discourse. (15)

Here, Godzich seems to put forward an understanding of the past as consisting of multiple frames of reference in which emergent cultures ('emergent literatures' / 'New literatures') may either co-exist with the dominant one ('unified discourse'), or operate in conflict with it. Instead of advocating that emergent cultures are in a state of development which is somehow inferior to that of fully developed, or 'emerged', literatures (Godzich 1994:15), Godzich sees them as being able to challenge hegemonic and monumentalising views of the 'emerged […] unified discourse' (15) – in this case Italian Canadian theatre and Canadian theatre respectively.

Godzich also seems to reject those approaches that take for granted the existence of a linear sequence of phases through which all societies and their culture must pass. [30] Importantly, he seems to reject the notion that 'emergent literatures' need to travel a path through different stages ('states') of development, from the lower rungs of a phase (which is necessarily more obscure and disorganised) to reach more culturally complex states (17). Emergent literatures, on the contrary, are not only on the same level as

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[30] This anti-linear and anti-developmental sense of emergence is indebted to Raymond Williams's tripartite idea of the 'dominant', the 'residual', and, indeed, the 'emergent' (1977:121-7). Williams is arguably the first critic to have effectively challenged a linear approach to history. In his words: '[t]he dominant are those hegemonic forces (of capitalism) which are most strong at any moment of history (121); the residual are those once strong forces associated with the past which are now weakened yet still capable of influence (122); the emergent are forces in ascendance which have not yet come into full strength (122-3). In any era, the dominant forces exert the most influence; residual and emergent forces, however, can also have powerful effects (O'Connor 2006:78). A work of literature can combine elements of all three forces, reflecting complex and even relatively autonomous relations with the socioeconomic order (O'Connor 2006:78).

emerged literatures, but any attempt to construct a continuous narrative by flattening out irregularities and differences between the two is fundamentally misguided. That is why, within this study of Italian Canadian theatre, I specifically explore inconsistencies, discontinuities, and sites of irregularity for their historical significance.[31] These sites of discontinuity reveal 'what has been and is *possible* and *not possible* to talk about' (Perkins 1992:4; emphasis his) within the cultural and theatrical contexts of Canada.

Closely linked with my approach to Italian Canadian theatre is my critical navigation through the various ideological presuppositions of writing about ethnic theatre. These notions are discussed in relation to plays, theatre groups, and playwrights that have implicitly or explicitly challenged long-established cultural discourses and theatrical practices in Canada, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. In this respect, I find myself in accordance with Winfried Siemerling, who says in his seminal work on *The New North American Studies* (2005) that:

> The 'new' is, like 'emergence', a term of relation; it is also an incomplete translation of the unknown, limiting it to articulations of difference with respect to the old. This 'translation' […] usually speaks in the recognized and recognizable language of the old, and thus displays, for better or worse, curious ironies or even outright contradictions. Such doubleness […] has been a longstanding feature of emergence. (2005:2)

Siemerling's own take on cultural emergence is that of 'an incomplete translation of the unknown,' which 'speaks in the recognized and recognizable language of the old'. This breathes new life into hoary binaries like 'majority/minority', 'dominant/subordinate' and 'mainstream/non-mainstream'. That Siemerling is trying to disrupt these binaries and to reconsider terms such as 'hegemony' (Foucault 2000; Gramsci 1998:366, 377) and 'mainstream' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:16-7) is only too apparent. First, he insists on reciprocity between 'emergent' and 'emerged' cultures, thereby avoiding the trap of seeing Italian Canadian theatre as a counter-hegemonic

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[31] These presuppositions are again linked to cultural studies, although they more openly follow Foucault's methodology (Foucault 2000).

practice which allegedly reacts to, or to some extent continues to depend on, Canadian theatre. Second, he posits the idea of a conversation between emergent and emerged cultures whereby the emergent culture does not necessarily have to attack hegemonic concepts of identity and identification ('[it] usually speaks in the recognized and recognizable language of the old'); rather, it enables many ethnic writers to write texts in major languages which apparently support and draw strength from some form or other of identitary affiliation. And finally, complementing Godzich, Siemerling stresses the notion that emergent literatures do not have to automatically oppose, or for that matter imitate, the 'old' in order to champion and canonise their own ethnic writers.

The popular self-representation of countries like Canada as a multicultural mosaic provides, at least on the surface, the possibility of forming a Gramscian historical bloc for immigrant populations. Yet this appears to be an insufficient vantage point for relatively isolated, unrepresented groups (Lionnet 1995), implying that Italian Canadian theatre practices should mainly be analysed with Canada in mind. Hence, my study of Italian Canadian theatre should neither be regarded purely as the cultural expression of a minority, nor as an extension of Italian cultural practices. Such an ideological approach would be both incomplete and misleading, as would a reading that merely reduced these relationships to a static dominant/subordinate dichotomy on the cultural level (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:16-7), not least because specific internal references to Italian Canadian cultural expressions might easily be overlooked.

As previously mentioned, rather than attempt an exhaustive account, which would be impossible anyway, this study offers an occasion to look at relatively uncharted theatre material thematically. The thematic basis[32] of my study is to be found

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[32] Thematic criticism has always permeated Canadian culture, and ethnic theatre monographs are still full of thematologists who draw extensively upon Jones (1970), Frye (1971), Sutherland (1971), Atwood (1972), Moss (1974), and Kroetsch (1985). Opposition to thematic criticism within Canadian critical circles is equally vigorous and started as early as 1976 with Frank

in the analysis of Italian Canadian work I conduct in every Act, where I sift the interpretative values and functions of the Italian Canadian plays I select, harnessing ethnographic studies in theatre[33] and a close-reading approach[34] to the analysis of primary texts. My analysis, it is true, combines into a retrospective survey, and the research protocols that inform my thesis can still be found in social, political, and legal history. However, a more competent understanding of ethnic identity also requires an appreciation of the internal, or psychological, nature of ethnic identification. As such, each case study examines how Italian Canadian theatre has provided indicators as to the social, political, and cultural conditions of post-1947 Italian immigrants, interrogating the ideological agendas of playwrights, theatre practitioners, theatre groups, and ethnic groups in relation to Canada. More specifically, the theatre material I have selected offers a theatre perspective on Italian Canadian family life, the commitments of men and women to each other, their children, and their communities. Importantly, this perspective does not ignore what Italian Canadians experienced firsthand: the uprooting from the old land, the settling in a foreign culture, the learning of a new language, and the profound change that swept through their lives at a time when they were still trying to adapt to life in Canada. Understanding the internal forces that accompanied the socioeconomic drive towards immigrant ethnicisation will shed light on the various factors underlying ethnic persistence among the children of those Italian immigrants

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Davey's seminal text 'Surviving the Paraphrase', in *Canadian Literature* 70, pp. 5-13. For more on counter-thematic criticism, see *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (1997) by Heble et al; also Powe, *A Climate Charged* (1984:92).

[33] This approach encourages a relativist reading of choices, priorities and habits when analysing a play. It warns, for instance, against the obsession of describing a visible and readable space, of looking for, and quantitatively processing, information and redundancies, of valuing aspects that deviate from the norm and show originality (Barba 1991; Grotowski 1968).

[34] The contributions of Greimas (1983), Barthes (1972, 1973, 1977) and Pavis (1985, 1996, 2005) are valuable, but their reflections should be developed beyond formalism. I have chosen here to focus on ideological signs anchored in socio-economic contexts and the cultural impacts of theatre practices (Knowles 2001; Knowles, Tompkins, and Worthen 2003; Worthen 2008), since these approaches tend to dissolve those arbitrary forms of compartmentalisation that have tended to separate drama, ethnography, and cultural studies.

who left Italy with their parents in the 1950s, and who constitute the majority of the playwrights and theatre practitioners to be covered in this study.

How is it possible to set up a study that avoids producing reference work and escapes the risk of providing a broad list of major themes? The first step, just as delicate as essential, is the delimitation of the field, which raises questions about how the criteria for inclusion are constructed. By selecting Italian Canadian plays written in Canada after 1947, mainly in Toronto and Montreal, by Italian immigrants with a manifest interest in theatre, I have already demarcated my field of action. Yet the detection of common threads within the subject matter of the theatre material in this thesis requires further consideration.

The identification of a theme is always relative, but themes are not fixed entities or 'essences'; rather, they are fluid practices that tend to influence and 'contaminate' one another. This does not mean of course that we should give up methodological rigour: in fact, it is precisely the elusive nature of thematic criticism that requires the construction of coherent systems in which the subject matter is well circumscribed, and where it is inserted into a network of relationships with other parent topics. In so doing, it is useful here to introduce the concept of 'thematic field' (Doležel et al. 1985), an open set of interrelated themes which then create a complex network of intersections. This potentially reveals the fundamental preoccupations of literature: identity, otherness, passion, journey, landscape, objects, and so on. It thus becomes possible for thematologists to distinguish themes which are common to works from very different backgrounds, or to isolate themes which relate to individual contexts, the specific conditions of material life (Ceserani et al. 2007), or specific literary movements. The study of thematic fields, therefore, must inevitably compete with changing historical and cultural contexts, genres and literary traditions (Brunel 1992; Blumenberg 1984).

This sometimes means dealing with the changing idea of literature itself and its multiple social functions (Moretti 2003).

Ethnic identity represents the all-important thematic field in this study, as a crucial aspect of the emergence of Italian Canadian theatre practices post 1947. It will come as no surprise to discover that immigrants and migrants alike often have complex individual ethnic identities; that these identities are expressed with some flexibility in different contexts; and that they are associated with tensions in the construction of collective ethnic identities. These points have been made often enough in studies of Canada as a multicultural nation. My vantage point is different here, though, as it is Italian Canadian theatre that will inform my reading. In this thesis, I will also seek to show that identity politics among Italian immigrants at both the individual and collective level are not just matters involving Canada. Rather, they also involve numerous transnational links and solidarities. The question about whether 'old' racialised ethnic boundaries are breaking down in a 'new' multicultural and transnational world remains difficult to answer because the evidence in support of this is still emerging, and is still based on a relatively small number of qualitative studies. There is a need to know much more, and this is arguably best achieved by focusing on one actual ethnic group, in this case Italian Canadians, and by looking at some of the ways in which they have made history on their own terms.

Overview of the thesis

The plan mapped out in this thesis traces, through three different 'Acts', three different areas of theatrical practice in different cultural moments and contexts. It also ghosts a narrative of Italian Canadian experiences in Toronto and Montreal more generally, going from a period of community-building amateur theatricals to the emergence of Italian Canadian theatre into mainstream theatre, through multicultural theatre first and transcultural theatre thereafter.

ACT I

In *Act I*, I describe the conditions out of which Italian Canadian theatre emerged, i.e., when Italian Canadian communities in Canada produced theatre works that reflected both their Italian and Canadian sensibilities. I want to look at how these practices negotiated an Italian Canadian heritage through community-building amateur theatricals. The temporal subdivision I adopt coincides with the removal of the Enemy Alien Act in 1947, and extends up to 1974, when one of the theatre groups I analyse dissolved (Il Piccolo Teatro di Toronto) and the Canadian government implemented a multicultural policy which brought about a new development in Italian Canadian theatre. I consider here two Italian Canadian cultural associations, in Toronto and Montreal, which re-opened at the beginning of the 1950s after the long period of inactivity that started in 1940, when Canada and Italy became enemy nations. These institutes received the second wave of Italian immigrants, who arrived in Toronto and Montreal from the 1950s onwards. My reason for choosing the Italian Canadian cultural associations in these two cities is that both Toronto and Montreal played the lion's share in attracting post-1947 immigrants from Italy. This made it possible for the two cities to invest in a wide range of cultural activities designed for their communities in an effort to maintain and promote Italian language and Italian culture while reflecting on their

roles and survival within the Canadian context. These initiatives were funded collectively by Italian Canadians, and they often included theatre. More specifically, I follow the fortunes of two Italian immigrant theatre practitioners, Amilcare Zanini (1928–1972) and Agostino Venier (1920–1969), and one amateur dramatic group, Il Piccolo Teatro Canadese di Toronto (1951–1972), which established its activities after 1947 through its founding member, Bruno Mesaglio (1911–1977).

By focusing on selected examples of Italian Canadian community-building amateur theatricals, *Act I* stages a dialogue between the theoretical ideas just articulated in the introduction and theories of community building (Cohen 1985; Gilroy 1987; Nancy 1986; Young 1990; Williams 1961, 1976) and community-based theatre (Armstrong 2000; Cohen-Cruz 2000; Cocke 2001; Kershaw 1992; Knowles 2001, 2004, 2008; Paterson 1990; McConachie 1998; Read 1995; Taylor 2003). The work I will present was written in Italian dialect and Italiese; it was explicitly aimed at Italian immigrants and staged within the Italian Canadian communities, mostly in the basements of local churches. These characteristics make the plays particularly suitable examples of community-based theatre. My argument is supported by Kershaw (1982), who, via Williams's *Long Revolution* (1961) and the more specific term 'structure of feeling' (1961:64), refers to the emotional bond generated by values and practices shared by a specific group, class or culture through the theatre. The concept of 'structure of feeling', for Kershaw, also includes ideology, in the sense of an articulated structure of beliefs, but it also ranges beyond it to encompass collective desires and concerns.

Audiences and sites of performance are also crucial to my understanding of primary sources. The work of Knowles (2001, 2004, 2008) Read (1995) and Cocke (1993), in particular, help me analyse the implications, both positive and negative, that the structures of feeling generated by these plays as community-based theatre might

have had on their survival and success outside of the specific Italian Canadian communities they involved. Recognising and re-affirming community identities, which Italian immigrants already possessed upon arrival in Canada, substantially informed their theatrical productions for nearly twenty years. Importantly, community-based performances, e.g. through heritage theatre, also helped the emergence among Italian immigrants of group identities as Italian Canadians in Canada; their reflections on how to negotiate their cultural survival in a new environment started here.

ACT II

Act II extends from 1973, when Canada introduced a Multiculturalism Council and a Multiculturalism Directorate, to 1997, when the federal Liberals led by Jean Chrétien officially ended the state-funded programme of cultural projects exclusively aimed at ethnic groups.

This chapter describes a turning point in my thesis: the period during which publicly subsidised theatres in Canada opened their doors to Italian Canadian contributions to their seasonal programmes. With the growing institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Canada between the 1970s and the 1980s, a system of payments was established to promote the full involvement and equal participation of ethnic groups in cultural projects aiming at the country's 'cultural enrichment' (Bouchard and Taylor 2006). I show what happened in two cities – Toronto and Montreal – whose Italian Canadian cultural agencies[35] employed the funds offered by federal ministry for multiculturalism to subsidise theatre projects and make their communities known outside their immediate circles. I analyse the following plays that benefited from these

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[35] This is how the federal ministry for multiculturalism renamed the Italian Canadian associations (and the associations of other white ethnic groups) on a provincial level in the 1970s; see *Act II*, p. 120.

initiatives: Tony Nardi's *La Storia dell'emigrante* (1979); Marco Micone's *Trilogie du silence*: *Gens du silence* (1982), *Addolorata* (1983), *Déjà l'agonie* (1986/1988); and *Homeground* (1986) by Caterina Edwards.

I emphasise the necessity to close-read these five play texts, starting from *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979) – chronologically the first theatre work by an Italian Canadian to have been awarded a grant through a system of payments established by the federal ministry for multiculturalism – and finishing with *Homeground* (1986), the last Italian Canadian play to be sponsored solely by the multicultural programme. I think about these plays' potential for a new approach to multicultural theatre in Canada. My investigation then moves forward to make extensive use of lexicons of opposition (conflicts between Italians and Canadians, Italian Canadians and their Italian parents, 'uprootedness' and relocation, integration and segregation), but I also negotiate these terms. I show more particularly that the plays of the period were structured around a triangulation of variables: an individual's vital ethnic heritage, a diverse Canadian present, and a responsive awareness of the uncertain future Italian Canadians faced in the 1980s.

These considerations underscore my attempt to contribute to a reformulation of the scholarly debate around multicultural theatre (Barba 1991; Brook 1972; Carlson 1996; Lo and Gilbert 2003; Knowles 2010; Mitchell 2004; Pradier 2008; Schechner 1996) and multiculturalism (Fish 1997; Griffiths 1994; Hade 1997; Hutcheon and Richmond 1990; Kamboureli 1996, 2000; Mac Key 2002; Siemerling 1996, 2005; Žižek 1997). I observe how the five selected plays, produced by playwrights who were in most cases experienced dramaturges, directors, and actors in their own plays as well as in other contexts (especially Tony Nardi), could rely on an efficient network of support. This opens up the possibility in turn for a renewed approach to multicultural plays in

Canada that counteracts those elements within Canada's multicultural policy that seemed geared to producing little more than cynical tokenism.

ACT III

In this closing *Act* of my thesis, I look at the late twenties and early twenty-first century emergence of a specific range of characteristics, ambitions and scopes which define a particular form of contemporary Italian Canadian theatre: Italian Canadian transcultural theatre. The chapter's material draws extensively on performances I have seen myself and on interviews I have conducted in July 2011 with three playwrights – Mary Melfi, Claudio Cinelli, and Carlo Chiarilli. The works analysed in previous chapters were all responses, to a greater or lesser extent, to the wishes of their respective communities to entertain themselves, to stage a collective cultural unity, and to see their own experiences as Italian Canadians reflected and represented in mainstream theatres. The Italian Canadian works of this chapter are still concerned with those aims, but they also seem to suggest that these plays can go beyond and move to-and-fro between their cultures, and that they are capable of embracing the coexistence of multiple cultures, transcending national boundaries as they do so.

The first part of *Act III* clarifies the primary issues of concern, interrogating how globalisation and transnationalism play out in Canada, and looking at how the Chrétien government and its neo-liberal visions – increasingly articulated through a lucrative interpretation of multiculturalism and culture – dominated public debate after 1993. This is followed by a review of concepts for understanding transnationalism (Gold and Nawyn 2013; Hannerz 1992, 2002; Huggan 2007, 2013; Kastoryano 2002; Levitt 2001; Malkki 1996; Quayson and Girish Daswan 2013; Vertovec 1999) in relation to emerging transnational communities in Toronto and Montreal (Gold 2000; Banting and

Kymlicka 2010; Richmond 2005), and their impact on Italian Canadians' ways of living and being over the last twenty years (Santucci 2010). The remaining sub-sections examine transculturalism (Bhabha 1994; Schulze-Engler and Helff 2009; Young 1995; Welsch 1999), transcultural theatre (Conquergood 2004; Feral 2009; Knowles 2009; Lo and Gilbert 2003; Pavis 1996; Schechner 1996, 2013), and target plays including Melfi's *Sex Therapy* (1996), Cinelli's *Migrants/Migranti* (2005), and Chiarilli's *Migrant Ventures* (2009). Through a close analysis of these playwrights' work and interviews, I investigate transcultural ways of being and belonging, and the implications of this for the playwrights' ethnic identity and their relationships of harmony and conflict with others.

My main argument here is that, although the various Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre groups that comprise my study as a whole are never over-burdened by the particularities of their identity-based theatre works, historical contingencies and life experiences led the particular playwrights in this chapter to an exploration of new forms of Italian Canadian theatre. New themes are currently being carved out on the premise that the flows of people, money, and communication across transnational social spaces are among the most thought-provoking elements in recent history (Albrow 1994; Albrow and King 1990; Featherstone 1990; Featherstone et al. 2005; King 1991; Kofman and Youngs 1996; Robertson 1992; Spybey 1996). I build on these observations in an effort to extend research on transnationalism and transculturalism which has been energised in recent years by newly emerging understandings of migrant social networks and changing patterns of migrant belonging in a transnational space that includes, but does not restrict itself to, the places where they currently reside. These migrant populations demand multiple identities and citizenships, while their intellectual advocates promote transnationalism by theorising the well-known fact that migrants weave a variety of durable links with their countries

of origin (Bhabha 1994; Biles et al. 2008; Labelle and Midy 1999; Nolin 1996). As the plays in this chapter testify, some of the outcomes are clearly dynamic and transformative, as when immigrants and migrants help one another get established, send significant financial support to relatives overseas, and use their networks to enrich the diversity of cultural, economic, and political life in Canada and Italy. Other outcomes, however, create major challenges, such as what to do when narrowly economistic forms of 'globalisation' (Ashcroft et al. 1998:110; Schechner 2013) see culture in purely monetary terms.

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Perhaps it is salutary to remind the reader at the outset of what this thesis is *not*. In this research, I am not primarily concerned with *linguistic studies*. A thesis on Italiese would require a careful consideration of phonological, morphological, and syntactic modulations, especially in combination with English, and of the numerous dialects spoken by Italian immigrants in Canada and their changes over time. Although I occasionally draw on linguistic markers in the play texts and language choices made by Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners, I generally refrain from using a linguistic approach. Rather, my reflections on language are always functional to the interpretative possibilities offered by the primary sources under study.

The main focus of this thesis is not *performance studies* either. My own inclination is to view everything from written plays to group-devised performances and street interventions as existing on an identifiable continuum of performance practices, and as engaging in different ways with underlying questions of site, text, spectatorship, representation, and context. Yet there now seems to be a strangely dichotomous situation in which '[a]ll too often, theatre is now categorized as the acting out of

dramatic literature in a purpose-built building, whereas performance is taken to encompass pretty much anything and everything else.' (Pickering 2008:10) Although performance can help shed light on the subject matter of this thesis and, in Stephen Bottoms's words, is now arguably more 'cutting-edge' (2003:174), it only occupies a small part of my analysis of Italian Canadian theatre. This is not to say that I see meaning as belonging only to the writer, nor do I see meaning as belonging only to one privileged code system – writing (Delgado 2003:5). I have already argued that a more effective position for critical analysis of my play texts is one that suggests there is no fixed meaning, blurring the line between drama and performance.[36] As I am moving in relatively uncharted territory, however, the main concern of this study is to document; to correct as well in so far as there has been limited interest in Italian Canadian theatre to date. This documentary impulse means I have had to start from the play texts, i.e. the material conditions out of which Italian Canadian theatre emerged. I needed to map, interrogate and create critical pathways for studies in Italian Canadian theatre, which is why archival research has played an important part in this thesis. The often fortuitous combination of newspaper records and private collections, plus some additional articles, photographs, and letters, have permitted a reconstruction of the major events and minor incidents that shape the history of Italian-Canadian theatre, also allowing me to speculate about Italian Canadian attitudes and to arrive at some provisional conclusions. Performance, too, has helped in the process. Yet, as Phelan points out, performance is evanescent: 'it is here today, gone tomorrow' (1993:146), and it leaves us with 'no recallable […] recollection we can take away and examine at leisure' (Counsell 1996:2). My engagement with performance has therefore

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[36] See above, 'note 1.'

been restricted to reporting performance-derived memories[37] through participation in theatrical events, interviews, and newspaper articles, which function as silent witnesses to the ephemeral and unrepeatable performances themselves.

Ultimately, this thesis is not about 'Canadian theatre' at all, and I strongly suspect that the Canada to be found in this thesis is not the 'Canada' many readers may expect. Nor, for the most part, are the playwrights and theatre practitioners to be considered here the ones who usually come to mind when thinking about 'Canadian theatre', even though some, such as Marco Micone, are known in specific literary circles or *art milieux*. That there is an increased awareness of, and familiarity with, Canadian theatre does not need to be argued here; we have left behind the years where the standing joke in Canadian arts circles used to be that: 'while Japanese critics could at least discuss the merits of both Kabuki and Noh theatre, in Canada there was simply "No Theatre"' (Edmonstone 1983:48). Yet, although the greater visibility of Canadian plays now makes them more readily accessible to students, scholars, theatre practitioners, and the general public, I believe there is still a case to be made that we – meaning scholars, readers, and audiences – should not just rely on the Canadian theatre works available to us and on current critical formulations. Rather, we should focus on exploring those neglected areas in Canadian theatre history that might help shed more light on specific aspects of the Canadian past.

Of course, not every play can claim the interest of both the reading public and the audience, nor can it produce sustained aesthetic discussion. Still, value judgements concerning aesthetic quality are inevitably framed by specific horizons of expectation,

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[37] I support Taylor when she argues that the efficacy of performance 'whether as art or as politics, stems from the way performances tap into public fantasies and leave a trace, reproducing, and at times, altering cultural repertoires.' (1999:65)

individual sets of preferences formed in interaction with shaping processes of criticism (Fuller 2004; Knowles et al. 2003). To look at these processes is also to consider the cultural contexts from which they spring (Fuller 2004), which is one of the main issues at stake here since these playwrights and theatre practitioners are not necessarily the Canadians 'Canadian theatre' knows about. For this reason, in this thesis I am intent on 'othering' Canadian theatre. My approach avoids the twin pitfalls of national specificity, on the one hand, and 'mainstream/minority' dichotomies, on the other. When such reflections prevail, they tend to eclipse other possibilities that debates around theatre in Canada might offer. These possibilities are the subject of this study, from which hopefully an 'other', an unexpected, Canada might emerge.

ACT I

Winfried Siemerling has written that 'the material conditions of a group dramatically affect the emergence of its cultural productions – its self-representations as well as its representations by others' (2010:163). Literature and the arts can help make it possible to recover and critically understand a forgotten, even repressed, historical past. Yet historical narratives alone, vital though these are, cannot provide the kind of creative revision necessary for an ethnic group to achieve cultural legitimacy; as Raymond Williams puts it in *The Long Revolution*: 'the most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is [the] felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time [–] a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living.' (1961:47)

As will be seen in this chapter, this seems particularly true when dealing with the emerging patterns of Italian Canadian theatre history from 1947 to 1974. This temporal subdivision coincides with the removal of the Enemy Alien Act in 1947, and extends up to 1974, when Il Piccolo Teatro Italiano Canadese in Toronto, the main theatre group I will go on to analyse here, dissolved. I consider here two Italian Canadian associations in Toronto and Montreal which re-opened at the beginning of the 1950s after the long period of inactivity that started in 1940, when Canada declared war on Italy. These institutes received the second wave of Italian immigrants, who arrived in Toronto and Montreal from the 1950s onwards. In addition to historical figures, which make Toronto and Montreal the favourite destinations among Italian immigrants,[1] my

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[1] According to official statistics (that average Italian sources and Statistics Canada), between 1951 and 1961, Canada's Italian population increased fourfold, from 150,000 to 500,000. Of these emigrants almost 70 per cent came from the south, 12 per cent from central Italy, and 18 per cent from the north. 70 per cent of Italians in Canada resided in urban centres of more than 500,000 people. Before the influx of new immigrants in 1947, Montreal was the Canadian city with the highest number of Italian immigrants, but figures were still very low given the high

reason for choosing the Italian Canadian associations in these two cities as a focal point is to be found in the wide range of activities the two institutes designed for their communities in an effort to maintain and promote Italian language and culture while reflecting on their roles within the wider Canadian context. These initiatives, which were funded collectively by the two associations, often included community-building amateur theatricals.[2] In particular, my chapter concentrates on two theatre practitioners, Amilcare Zanini (1928–1972) and Agostino Venier (1920–1969), and one amateur theatre group that established its activities after 1947, Il Piccolo Teatro Canadese di Toronto (1951–1974), led by Bruno Mesaglio (1911–77).

My choice of these specific Italian Canadian figures and groups aims to show how community-based theatre is often as much about *works* as *plays*, in the sense that it represents a collective attempt to work through issues within a specific community. Specifically, the Italian Canadian productions I have selected here illustrate the mechanisms through which the cultural heritage of the communities involved was kept alive in everyday life and became a source of ongoing celebration as well as critique. This work is predominantly Italo-centric, drawing attention to the country that immigrants had left behind, which became almost a moral requirement in so far as it allowed family and community life to prosper and an Italian system of values to survive in Canada. It also reflected the material conditions of the two Italian Canadian communities, Toronto and Montreal, in which the most prominent theatre practitioners were based. To look at theatre in this way helps us understand the dynamics

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percentage of target migrants. Not until the mass migration of the 1950s and 1960s did Toronto become the dominant city for Canada's Italian Canadian population. For more statistical data and numbers see Bagnell (1989); Harney (1986); Salvatore (1999); or *sub-section III* below.

[2] These two institutes were almost certainly not the only ones that provided their Italian communities with theatre groups. Yet the patterns revealed by my research for this chapter seem to confirm that Italian Canadian theatre tended at this time to gravitate towards Toronto and Montreal with some exceptions in Hamilton, Edmonton, and Vancouver. The evidence also suggests that Italian Canadian cultural institutes did not work in total isolation from each other; rather, their efforts were often linked, with representatives from one group overseeing or cooperating with others. I will return to this in more detail in *Act II*.

through which Italian Canadian sentiments emerged, but it also facilitates an appreciation of the material conditions out of which Italian Canadian communities in Canada shaped their ethnicity at the time, in part by producing theatre work that reflected both their Italian and Canadian sensibilities through community-building amateur theatricals. The pertinence of Italian Canadian theatre of the period goes even further, showing how cultural tradition and the sense of a collective identity and shared history emerged from multiple local ways of belonging in which the 'new' Canadian present was continually renegotiated in dialogue with the 'old' Italian past.

I

Before going into more detail on this double emergence, I need to qualify the key terms 'community' and 'community-based theatre.' 'Community', in its modern sense, has been a problematic term for sociologists since at least the 1950s, when as many as ninety-four different use-definitions of community, with very little in common between them, were identified (Newby 1989:27). Just like 'emergence', the term 'community' has served as a convenient symbol encapsulating a number of contradictory ideas. As Williams notes in *Keywords*, references to 'community' tend to suggest positive connotations without clear meaning (1976:66). This ambiguity is, in fact, an important element of how 'community' functions. In *The Symbolic Constructions of Community*, the sociologist Anthony Cohen contends that 'community' operates as a 'God word', used symbolically to avoid the confrontation of its connotative differences (1985:76). 'Community', like 'God', symbolically unites those who believe in and employ the concept, even though these individuals may have very different ideas as to its meaning. Community is generally understood as 'a function of unity' (Williams 1976:69), whether that unity is one of location, class, interest, age,

or heritage. 'Race' and 'ethnic background' as forms of unity are hardly foreign to the debates around community, but reflection on these terms is not central to Williams's reasoning. While, as will be seen, a racial and ethnic identification of Italian immigrants to Canada with the label 'Italian Canadians' was starting to emerge in this period, it was not the preferred tool for building community discourses within Italian Canadian communities. As the next chapter will show, this awareness would be determined by the newly implemented multicultural policies of the 1970s and the 1980s.

Although the idea of 'unity' gives community the positive connotation that Williams cites, sociologists and cultural theorists such as Cohen (1985), Paul Gilroy (1987), Marion Young (1990), and Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) have pointed out that 'unity' also implies boundaries, difference, and exclusion. In order for a community to distinguish itself, its members must differentiate themselves in some way from other communities through boundaries of land, behaviour, or background. These are fluid rather than stable boundaries, dependent on individual perceptions and definitions. According to Cohen (1985), in relation to the heterogeneity of community, the 'singular being' (Cohen's term) is exposed to limits – to birth, death, and alterity – and in this exposure he or she finds not fusion, union, or communion with others, but limit and difference. Meanwhile, for Nancy (1991), community is not experienced as the fusion of autonomous subjects, but rather as the being-together of singular finite beings. The singularity of the self and the alterity of the other are both revealed in this process. This finitude of being is exposed through birth and death, and by the enactment through touch that identifies the boundaries of the other's skin. Such limits reveal both the alterity of the other and the engagement with this different being (Gilroy 1987). Hence, community is a sharing evoked by the exposure to these boundaries (Young 1990). Community, like emergence, is a sharing which is never completed. This incompleteness does not imply lack but suggests the ongoing activity of sharing.

Community, in this sense, is always in process; it is always short of any totalising union (Young 1990). These fundamentally unstable characteristics of community – its evocation of the being of singularity as an inclining towards others, its revelation of finitude as the structure of self and others in the sharing of community, and its incompleteness, even unravelling – constitute an understanding of community that radically contrasts with the assumptions of standard, cohesive formulations of community. Community, seen in this alternative way, comprises 'limit' and 'finitude' rather than in Williams's terms, a 'union of individuals' (1976).

While such visions of community insist on sites of difference, which are in turn central to the emergence of Italian Canadian communities in this period, they shy away from any sustained formulation of how this difference is enacted or maintained. Although they refer to the limit between self and other, they do not suggest how this limit is perceived or experienced. Furthermore, whilst they formulate community as an undoing of unity, they do not articulate what the process involves or how it is enacted. I would suggest that, by ignoring the instances and mechanisms of such processes, dissonance, disagreement, and resistance inherent within any given community can easily be overlooked. Community may allow singularities to be engendered through exposing and sharing, and nonconformity to be experienced even when individuals join together as a group. Community, like emergence, should be seen as a *process*, not a *product*. Ignoring that formulations of community can be produced while experiencing fractures and disagreement within a given group is another way of enforcing homogeneity. Key to this chapter will be an analysis of 'community' which hinges on individuals experiencing sentiments of agreement and disagreement within occasions for social gathering.

Given my understanding of 'community', it is not difficult to derive the general aims and orientation of 'community-based theatre' for the purpose of this chapter. As the privileged form of expression for Italian Canadian theatre at the time, community-based theatre clearly responded to the immediate requirements of such heterogeneous, extended circles of immigrants that were taking shape within the various Italian Canadian associations, notably in Toronto and Montreal. A working definition of its features, within the scope of my research, is offered by Ric Knowles (2001) who, instead of arriving at a single characterisation, describes community-based theatre as a patchwork of related sources, goals, and structures. Their principles include the following:

> Community-based theater is grounded in the local and specific. […] The traditional and indigenous are integral to community-based theater and valued for their ability to help us maintain continuity with the past, respond to the present, and prepare for the future. Community-based theater strives to be inclusive in its producing practices. Presentation of the work is made in partnership with community organizations. […] Community-based theater is linked to the struggles for cultural, social, economic, and political equity for all people. It is fundamentally a theater of hope and often joy […] Community-based theater is given its voice by the community from which it arises. The makers of community-based theater are part of the culture from which the work is drawn. The people who are the subjects of the work are part of its development from inception through presentation. (Knowles 2001:250)

Stitching together the separate components of this matrix is one embedded thread: the processes and products of community-based theatre are built on a strong alliance (and, at times, a complete merging) of theatre practitioners with a local 'community'; whether in agreement or disagreement Knowles does not say, but this seems irrelevant to his definition and to that of most theatre professionals.[3] Indeed,

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[3] In line with the sociological debate outlined above, contemporary scholarship on theatre sometimes refrains from using the word 'community' because it carries too much historical baggage and evokes so many contradictory meanings and emotions. Bruce McConachie (1998) and Dudley Cocke (2001), for instance, prefer 'grassroots' over 'community-based' to designate the kind of theatre Knowles describes, thereby placing emphasis on its class implications. In her analysis of Chicano theatre among migrant farm workers, Maria Delgado (2003) questions the representational truth and long-term effectiveness of the word 'community,' dismissing it as 'mythology'. (230) From her point of view, using terms like Victor Turner's 'communitas'

scholar-practitioners are all in agreement that, within the overall experience of community-based theatre, amateur and professional actors, designers, and technicians work cooperatively in the process of planning, audition, adaptation, and performance (Armstrong 2000; Cohen-Cruz 2000; Cocke 2001; Kershaw 1992; Paterson 1990; McConachie 1998; Read 1995) to fashion productions that are 'worthy of the actual communities that constitute their audiences' (Read 1995:25). In such settings, members of the audience participate as characters in the play, sharing their own emotions, fuelling the whole community, and, in many instances, even the act of writing itself becomes a collective rather than an individual theatrical production. As Jan Cohen-Cruz points out, 'many theatre artists working within cultural clubs and associations note that their choice of medium is well suited to the goals inherent in reaching their audiences, and that the medium fits un/comfortably with their traditions, culture, and ways of expression.' (2000:370) Dudley Cocke takes the argument further. He asserts that theatre for the community is not merely an adaptation or appropriation of one's particular theatre tradition; it also fits with 'the actual soil where the performance takes place' (2001:211). Ric Knowles, however, takes an opposing view and writes:

> Although performance has always been a fundamental aspect of community theatre, drama and theatre as they are currently understood are European forms. [...] The act of writing and staging 'plays,' then, necessarily involves community theatre artists in simultaneous activities of *preserving* and *translating* [emphases mine]. (2008:55)

(Turner in Delgado 2003:232), the temporary – and perhaps strategic – 'inclusive bonding' that occurs among participants in a 'ritual', to describe the effects of a play labelled as 'community-based theatre', conceals very real differences of background, gender, and belief (234). In this sense, Delgado's work positions itself within the debate delineated by Cohen, Gilroy, and Young. Nonetheless, McConachie, Cocke, and Delgado all concur in adopting the term 'community' to describe the work produced by theatre makers they discuss in their respective monographs (Cocke 2001; Delgado 2003; McConachie 1998). In another seminal work on performance studies, eminent theatre scholars and practitioners go so far as to detail experiences in 'community-based theatre', self-described in the title of an entire chapter devoted to them (Bial 2004:77-113). Despite its problems for critics and practitioners, the evidence suggests that the discourse of 'community' is wedded to descriptions and analysis of this kind of theatre. For further critical reading on community-based theatre by scholar-practitioners, see Bruce McConachie (1998), Ann Elizabeth Armstrong (2000), Doug Paterson (1990), and Jan Cohen-Cruz (2000).

While I find myself in broad agreement with Knowles, it is always important to consider how community-based theatre responds to such 'activities'.

The community-based theatre that emerged in the Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal between the 1950s and the 1970s certainly adhered to Knowles's definition. In order to respond to the requirements of the heterogeneous, extended circles of immigrants that were emerging from within the two Italian Canadian associations in Toronto and Montreal, the theatre work that was produced during this period necessarily moved between preserving and translating. The twin acts of *preserving* and *translating* helped Italian Canadian community-based theatre emerge at the time, and a prolific dialogue took place across the two terms, which were to some extent synonymous with 'Italian' and 'Italian Canadian'. The lifeblood of this transformative experience, however, lay in how the various artistic decisions made by theatre practitioners and members of the various Italian Canadian communities authenticated the existence of the communities themselves on stage. These features, which were inherent in Italian Canadian theatre of the time, were coupled with its communal nature and its ability to work through issues within the relevant Italian Canadian communities, thereby creating an immediate intimacy and relevance to them. This helps explain why community theatre was the preferred medium of representation among Italian Canadian communities of the period.

As a result, many Italian Canadians who stopped going to the theatre after emigrating, or those who would not otherwise go, not only went to the theatre, but also participated actively in it: '[t]heatre appeared to be able to transform, and the communities that invested in such practice came to recognize theatre as an art form that they could utilize to examine and address issues in their communities' (Gaspari, 4 November 2009). As in other contexts where community theatre was (and still is) used,

Italian Canadian plays of the period functioned as theatre aimed at '*effectively* helping people reflect more critically on the kind of society in which they live.' (Read 1995:91; emphasis mine).

II

'The Italian invasion of postwar Canada' (1986:25), as Robert Harney has dubbed it, was part of a larger diaspora that saw seven million Italians migrate, temporarily or permanently, to countries in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere during the three decades after the Second World War. Italy's earliest migrants tended to be northerners who headed for other countries in Europe, but they were soon joined, and then outnumbered, by central and southern Italians (Bevilacqua et al. 2002:93-6). In order to understand the implications of this, it is paramount that we look at earlier emigration patterns in Italian history. In the following, I offer a brief reconstruction of the stories of the Italians who first entered Canada, lingering on the expectations about Italy and Italians that preceded and welcomed them there.

Historians have identified a pattern within Italian immigration from 1880, the year of the great European agrarian crisis, to 1928, when Mussolini made Italian emigration illegal; Italian Canadian scholars commonly define this time frame as the 'first wave of [Italian] immigration' (File 28885:1) to Canada.[4] Before 1880, Italian migrants journeyed to Canada as individuals in the service of foreign monarchs (English, French, or Spanish), soldiers of fortune, men of letters, and peddlers. They did little to disrupt long-standing North-American and European associations of Italy with art and music; as Kenneth Bagnell puts it: 'Long before there was an Italian

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[4] My sources are to be found in the 1898 *Solimbergo's Report* (Solimbergo was the Italian Honorary Consul in Montreal from 1895 to 1904), in the Public Archives of Canada, Immigration Branch, RG 76, Vol. 128, File 28885:1.

national state [formed in 1861],[5] both Italian nationalists and intellectuals accepted Roman classicism, Renaissance humanist culture, and baroque art and music as distinctly Italian expressions of creativity' (1989:111). Throughout the nineteenth century, albeit in small numbers, Ita1ian musicians, artists, architects, chefs, and performers immigrated to Canada (File 28885:5). Wealthy Canadians also travelled to Italy, hoping to learn to appreciate the high culture produced by an older civilisation (Harney 1986:15).

This is not to say that poorer migrants could not be found among artisans, skilled masons, entrepreneurs, and even some professionals. Already in the years after the French Revolution, radical republican exiles, chimney sweeps, and street performers had slowly begun to replace artisans and artists as the most visible of Italy's migrants (Harney 1986:15). However, to speak of them strictly as Italians (even Italians in sentiment) would be inaccurate, as Italy as a nation did not exist then, and it would also fail to do justice to the extremely diverse and controversial historical reality of their times for 'earlier Italian migrants primarily identified themselves with the city in which they were born' (Harney 1986:15). Ultimately, Canada was still receiving a relatively small number of immigrants from Italy, which cannot be compared to the vast and worldwide population movement that has been called 'the proletarian mass migrations' (Bagnell 1989; Harney 1986:43).

In light of this, the first wave of Italian immigration finds its own definition, but not its recognised pattern, which is normally referred to as 'target migration' (Cannistraro and Rosoli 1979), i.e. around temporary work permits which never lasted more than two years (Harney 1986:43). At least initially, although many Italian immigrants would eventually settle in Canada, the majority would generally return to Italy or would migrate to other parts of Europe or South America (Cannistraro and

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[5] See 'note 7' (below).

Rosoli 1979). Moreover, when Mussolini declared immigration 'an illegal act' in 1928 (Harney 1986:45),[6] would-be Italian migrants were forced to remain at home.

Fourteen million Italians, predominantly from the south, left Italy between 1880 and 1928. According to the 1881 census (Census Canada 2013), there were 3,545 Italians living in Canada, with the highest concentration in Montreal and Toronto. Again, though, most Italians who left Italy for Canada did not think of themselves as Italians; their cultural identities were still tied to the villages and towns from which they came (Salvatore 1999:30). After all, Italy, as a nation, was only 19 years old, and its unification had resulted in further political and social disparities, since the Risorgimento[7] and the annexation of the south appeared not to have fulfilled the promise of better living conditions for the majority of its population:

> The promised redistribution of land to those southerners who fought in the Risorgimento did not take place, and the feudal agricultural economy on which the Bourbon rule was based contributed to the disfranchisement of southern Italians since literacy and land ownership requirements made about 70% of southern men ineligible to vote as late as 1912. (Astarita 2005:287).

In the introduction to his translation of Antonio Gramsci's *The Southern Question*, Pasquale Verdicchio writes that in 1860, after 'Giuseppe Garibaldi's so-called liberation of Sicily' (2006:7) and the south from Bourbon rule:

> [it] soon became obvious to the Southern masses that the effort was to benefit them much less than they had been led to believe. The collaboration of Northern "liberators" with Southern landowners further rooted the imbalances that had been established by the Bourbons. (7)

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[6] In Italy, after 1924, Mussolini's government limited external and internal migration. In 1928 emigration was made illegal (Cannistraro and Rosoli 1979).

[7] 'Risorgimento' is commonly referred to as the 19th-century movement for Italian unification that culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy, in 1861, which was formed with the house of Savoy at its head. For more, see Astarita (2005); Gilmour (2011); Mangione (1993); Pearce and Stiles (2006); and Smith (1997).

This collaboration intensified the problems of the destitute population of the rural south. The agrarian crisis that hit Europe in 1880, mainly due to the import of cheap Russian and American grain, caused a dramatic surge in migration from the Italian south (Astarita 2005:288-9). Environmental disasters and the scarcity of water added to an already precarious situation (Astarita 2005; Mangione 1993) and propelled great numbers of southern Italians to leave, at first temporarily, as target migrants, and later, in greater numbers, as settlers. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Italian Canadian author Benedetta Pignataro wrote of the 1880s' droughts that turned the Italian south into a wasteland and propelled so many to leave:

> Nonno [my grandfather] lived in Puglia when whatever potable water was available was sold to the poor at exorbitant prices; when much of the water of Puglia was tainted and undrinkable; when much of the water of Puglia was standing water, which bred mosquitoes, which gave the people of Puglia malaria, which killed the people of Puglia in astonishing numbers. (2011:5)

Labelled as the 'sweatbacks of Europe' (Harney 1986:43), these southern Italians were essentially men who would perform back-breaking work[8] at low wages and were prepared to endure poor living and working conditions (Colucci and Sanfilippo 2010; Gabaccia 1984; Mangione 1993). Women and the elderly were excluded from Canadian immigration policies at this time because the available jobs were considered not suited to them (Mangione 1993; Pivato 1996:13). Italian male workers were recruited directly from private companies in Canada, on temporary work permits (Pivato 1996:14). They were chosen by a 'padrone', a boss who had agents in many Italian villages. These

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[8] At first Italian male seasonal workers predominated in Canada, mainly consisting of southern Italian migrants who returned to the cities after clearing brush, setting rails, mining in northern Ontario, or labouring on the farms of the Niagara peninsula. Gradually, as Toronto and other cities needed labour to build an urban infrastructure of sewers and trolley lines, the Italian population grew and became more permanent (Colucci and Sanfilippo 2010; Harney 1986:43).

agents relied on a primitive system of chain migration[9] that involved sending to Canada several men from the same family: brothers, male cousins, and male relatives. There were cases in which skilled men of a village had all been sent to Canada to work for two or three years, leaving women, children and the elderly to farm their lands in southern Italy. In the late nineteenth century, in works such as *I malavoglia* (*The House by the Medlar Tree*, 1881)*,* the Sicilian verist writer Giovanni Verga powerfully depicted the abject living conditions of the southern poor that led to massive migration:

> I don't want to lead this life any longer. I want to change my condition and to change yours. I want that we should be rich mamma, Mena, you, Alessio, all of us. We shall leave the country.
>   Padron 'Ntoni opened his eyes very wide and listened, pondering, to this discourse, which he found very hard to understand. " Rich!" (1992:XI)

For the poor of the south, 'Canada beckoned' (Pignataro 2011:4), which made it only too easy for pre-war Italian immigrants to believe in their assimilation in Canadian society. One significant example comes from Montreal City Council which, in 1901, decided to commission a statue in honour of Giovanni Caboto, which risked enraging the Québécois for potentially overshadowing the French explorer Jacques Cartier. In 1911, as the influx of Italian immigrants continued, the same Council put forward the idea of opening a public area between Jean-Talon and Mozart, later rechristened the Jean-Talon area, where Italian immigrants could buy Italian products: *la marchetta – the Jean-Talon Market.* According to Bagnell, 'a market was just what the Italian immigrant residents of the area [now at the heart of Montreal's Little Italy] needed.'[10] (1989:145)

As Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno point out in their study *Are Italians White?,* 'Canada made [Italian immigrants] hope for a pluralist and

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[9] See below, p. 68.

[10] Fresh fruits and vegetables could be bought cheaply, and live animals – chickens, rabbits, and on feast days kid and lamb – satisfied the need for fresh meat for many who were versed in the traditional practice of animal slaughter. The sale of live animals continued until the mid-1960s, when it was banned by city authorities out of concern for hygiene (Bagnell 1989).

democratic society that made them feel welcome, erasing the spectre of the social and racial inequalities these groups had experienced in their countries of origin' (2003:5). Habermas seems to confirm this when claiming that 'Canada needed [Italian immigrants], and, by becoming members of their respective ethnic communities in Canada, they responded positively by identifying with their new national identity' (1998:24).

The fact that, at this point in time, immigrants in North America also felt strong normative pressure to assimilate should not be overlooked. The pernicious nature of this strategy is only too evident as early constructions of Italian Canadian ethnicity seem to me to be understood as carrying the privilege of a legitimate, full Canadian identity. Immigrants were tacitly encouraged to discard their home cultures and ethnic identities while at the same time adopting the culture of the country to which they had moved.

Some have argued that this criticism is unfair (Alba 1995, 1999; Bauböck 2001; Hollinger 1995). They point out that the concept of assimilation has been used over the years to refer simply to a 'closing of the gap' between cultures that takes place as a 'two-way street,' with each culture interacting with others and being changed in the process (Alba and Nee 1997). Yet most historians (Bagnell 1989; Bevilacqua et al. 2002; Cannistraro and Rosoli 1979; Guglielmo and Salerno 2003; Harney 1986; Mangione 1993; Salvatore 1999) tend to agree that, with the outbreak of the Second World War, when Italian Canadians became suspect, the paradox of associating assimilation with inclusiveness became even greater (Gerstle 2001; Guglielmo 2003; Guglielmo and Salerno 2003; Jacobson 1999; Salvatore 1999). While it certainly cannot be said that the war marked a time of greater inclusiveness for Italian Canadians, assimilationist attitudes appear to have been propelled by it: 'the war years hastened

changes in popular understandings of the value of non-British ethnic communities, […]

and *appropriateness of assimilation* [emphasis mine] as a guide to immigration policy.'

(Chinook Mtd 2010)

During the war, 600,000 Italian immigrants were categorised, like many Asian

Canadians, as 'enemy aliens' and were subject to discriminatory treatment (Bagnell

1989; Carter 1980; Harney 1985; Thompson 2011). Approximately 30,000 people,

including women and children, were listed as 'enemy aliens' and about 700 (out of

112,625), many of whom were involved in activities such as teaching Italian or radio

broadcasting, were arrested and put in internment camps (Canton et al. 2012; Harney

1985; Iacovetta et al. 2000; Pivato 1994). Although the arrests often had a primarily

symbolic function,[11] the imperative not to speak 'the enemy language' was acutely felt

in Italian Canadian households and communities all over Canada (Iacovetta et al.

2000:161). As David Carter observes:

> The message conveyed to Italian Canadians through the actions of the authorized
> RCMP and the pervasive attitudes that informed them was clear: the use of the
> Italian language was incompatible with being or becoming a loyal Canadian
> during the war years. (1980:167)

For many children of immigrants and their descendants, the silencing of

their language of origin resulted from much more than generic pressure or desire

to assimilate into Canada: to speak Italian meant, during the Second World War,

to be anti-Canadian, to be an enemy (Canton 2012; Viscusi 2006:x). And even

while Italian clubs and schools were being dismantled, and Italian cultural activities

strongly discouraged, many Italian Canadians proclaimed their nationalism and love

of their adopted country through high rates of military enrolment, even as Canada

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[11] On June 10, 1940, following Italy's declaration of war against Great Britain and her allies, Prime Minister Mackenzie King authorised the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to intern Italians considered a threat to Canada's security. They were assumed to be part of the Fascist regime and thus a threat to national security. Many of these were photographed, fingerprinted, and ordered to report monthly to the RCMP (Canton et al. 2012).

went to war with Italy (Carter 1980; Harney 1985; Iacovetta et al. 2000; Mangione 1993).

Worldwide battles between fascist and antifascist activists managed to permeate Italian Canadian communities across Canada; and just as Italian Canadians' seemingly enthusiastic participation in the Canadian army has been recorded, so too many others admired Mussolini for the pride he instilled in what he called the 'Italian race'. It may seem ironic that nationalism and pride in the Italian race soared along with the Canadisation[12] of immigrants and their children. The temporary enthusiasm for Mussolini that historians Franca Iacovetta and Robert Ventresca have labelled the 'fascisticization' (1996) of Italian Canadians encouraged ethnic pride, but it was expressed in distinctly North American ways:

> If Mussolini and the success of his war in Ethiopia, in 1935, consolidated the idea among Italians that they were an expansive race, capable of ruling a new empire governed from Rome, the event fed into the imaginary of Italian Canadians as a response to mass migration of other ethnic groups to whom Italian Canadians felt superior. (Pennacchio in Iacovetta et al. 2000:59)

While it may seem possible to speak of early formations of a distinct Italian Canadian identity emerging from a separate Italian and a Canadian one, history seems to suggest otherwise. According to *Immigrant Voices* (Chinook Mtd 2010), the government funded project aimed at digitising archival material on immigration to Canada, Canadian historians consider the war years as 'pivotal in changing public opinion towards the ways Canada dealt with their ethnic communities.' (Palmer 1982:36) In particular, the internment of Italian Canadians caused a fracture between Italian Canadians and their adopted country (Canton 2012; Iacovetta et al. 2000; Thompson 2011). Carter states that 'importantly, original archival material, normally held in the premises of the well-established Italian cultural institutes in Toronto and

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[12] Rates of naturalisation picked up notably in the late 1930s (see Bevilacqua et al. 2002; Mangione 1993).

Montreal, was destroyed or disappeared; and cultural evidence of earlier activities of the Italian Canadians communities was deeply compromised' (1980:168).

Together with anti-Italian feelings and governmental concerns affecting the lives of Italian Canadian communities throughout Canada, race-based theorists brought about a sharp re-examination of Canada's immigration policies, and Canadians found the presence of enemy alien immigrants, like the Italians, in Canada even more 'distressing' (Iacovetta and Ventresca 1996). North American immigration quota laws, which had been introduced 20 years earlier,[13] were brought back during the Second World War more severely. Their effect on Italian immigrants does not lie as much in the mechanism itself, as Fascism made immigration from Italy illegal in 1928, but rather in the underlying philosophy that fuelled it. Its values and principles were expressed within an ethnocentric white Canada framework in effect up until 1962 (Lam and Richmond 1995:264).[14] To understand this, historians usually turn to Italy's intellectuals of the period who, in Verdicchio's words, 'were busy drawing negative portraits of an Italy – rural, poor, and southern – they had discovered in the course of Italian unification' (2006:15). Positivist in nature,[15] Italy's most influential racialist theorists of the era of the mass migrations disparaged southern Italians – notably Neapolitans, Calabrians, and Sicilians – as 'primitive and backward races, closer in their levels of civilization to Africans than to Lombards or Venetians and characterized by high rates of criminality'. (Schneider 1998:143)[16] While northern

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[13] North American immigration quota laws in 1921 and 1924, introduced because of economic difficulties and nativist hostility to immigrants, also reduced immigration considerably. Yet this did not affect Italian immigration patterns, which remained steady until 1928 (Harney 1986; Pivato 1994).

[14] For more on this, see *Act III*, p. 181.

[15] Among them, Cesare Lombroso is regarded as one of the founders and updaters of the scholarly field of criminology (Schneider 1998). For more, see Iacovetta (in Guglielmo and Salerno 2003); Loriggio 2004; Pivato (1994); and Schneider (1998).

[16] Following Edward Said, the anthropologist and historian Jane Schneider has termed northern Italians' racialisation of southerners as 'orientalism in one country.' (1998; book title)

Italians were regarded as Europeans, southern Italians were considered among the ignorant masses destined for menial labour (Astarita 2005; Gabaccia 1984; Mangione 1993). What Italian and international historians now define as a 'political stratagem' to justify the advancing of 'the House of Savoy's nation-building programme' in the name of a 'civilising mission', by giving it 'legitimacy and credibility' (Guarracino et al. 1998; Giardina et al. 2009; Gilmore 2011), ended up affecting the lives of many emigrants from southern Italy for years to come.

By 1899, Canada immigration policies had classified northern and southern Italians as two 'distinctive races': the few northern Italian immigrants were recorded as 'Celtic' and the growing number of southern Italian immigrants as 'Negro' (Guglielmo and Salerno 2003:34). In 1911, the United States Commission on Immigration report included the *Dictionary of Races and Peoples*, which Canada adopted, and which catalogued northern and southern Italians separately (Jacobson 1999: 78-80). The Canadian government turned again to Italian intellectuals, who also stigmatised southern Italians as 'violent criminals' and as 'overly focused on bodily pleasure.' (Gabaccia 1984:46) Psychological testing was also devised to create discriminatory classifications that placed southern Italians at the bottom of the labour hierarchy (Bevilacqua et al. 2002; Colucci and Sanfilippo 2010; Mangione 1993). Discussing American anthropologist Margaret Mead's research on the use of intelligence tests 'to reinforce contemporary notions of racial hierarchy,' Nancy Carnevale points out:

> Southern Italians held a decidedly low place in that hierarchy. [Mead] writes that intelligence testing had 'allocate[d] to the Italian a place below the negro.' But intelligence tests were not only used to justify racialist public policies such as immigration laws. As Mead noted, average citizens drew upon them to justify popular notions of race. Mead's main concern, however, was with the practice of placing children in the public schools according to

their performance on tests which she believed put the children of immigrants at a disadvantage. (2009:57)

Such theories would affect, but not necessarily hinder, the first wave of Italian immigrants – who, as has been seen, either voluntarily or forcibly ended up assimilating into Canadian society. Yet the influence and wider circulation, in translation as of the 1930s, of polemical race-based works from Italy would have its effect. Not least, such work cemented among international readers negative stereotypes towards southern Italian immigrants, which would persist over the decades. Hence, when the Enemy Alien Act was eventually lifted in 1947, and a new wave of immigration to Canada initiated, from southern Italy almost exclusively,[17] the increased retreat of those immigrants into their protective Little Italies should come as no surprise.

III

The vast majority of adult Italian Canadians today are the children of those Italian immigrants who arrived in Canada after 1947, joining the old-timers, the first wave of immigration, in Canada's largest cities, Toronto and Montreal. How best can the immigrant experiences of these newcomers be understood? In addressing this central concern, the views and responses of the host society as well as the internal history of the Italian immigrant groups have to be taken into account.

In the post-war period, Canada remained initially hesitant to admit large numbers of Italians. Several factors account for this policy, not least the decided lack of enthusiasm for immigration that prevailed throughout Canada immediately following the war (Bevilacqua et al. 2003; Chinook Mtd 2010; Schneider 1998). The language used to frame legislated immigration policy became fundamentally important; its

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[17] See below, pp. 67-8.

main items included laws and policies on the selection of economic immigrants whom Canada wished to attract for their work skills. Fearful that recession might follow wartime prosperity, federal officials were reluctant to return to the more open-door policy of the pre-Depression era; they busied themselves instead with pressing reconstruction matters (Bevilacqua et al. 2003; Chinook Mtd 2010). Quebec premier Maurice Duplessis's adoption of an anti-immigration platform reflected the views of many Québécois, while Anglo-Canadians were almost as reticent (Dickinson and Young 2003). The result of a survey released in April 1946 showed that 61 per cent of Anglo-Canadians and 71 per cent of Québécois opposed mass immigration from Europe. Some 45 per cent of Canadians were even hostile to British immigration; in Quebec 73 per cent were opposed. When asked who they most wanted to keep out - the subject of another poll - most said the Japanese and the Jews, though 25 per cent said the Italians (Colucci and Sanfilippo 2010; Schneider 1998).

After all, Italy was still an enemy state,[18] and, in the wake of the Second World War, nativist opposition to Italians resurfaced. Long-standing prejudices regarding southern Italians' cultural 'backwardness' reappeared and Canadian nativists again started to demand the exclusion of Europe's racially 'inferior' immigrants, along with Asians (Guglielmo and Salerno 2003). As southern Europeans, Italians had long been considered far less desirable than the British, white Americans, and northwestern Europeans who traditionally were Canada's preferred immigrants (Colucci and

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[18] On October 23 2011, a commemorative wall, which recognised the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War, was unveiled by Employment, Social Development and Multiculturalism Minister, Jason Kenney, in Ottawa (Thompson 2011). The memorial wall was a testament to honour and acknowledge, by means of a formal apology, all those Italian immigrants and Canadians of Italian descent who were, in the words of Kenney, 'Italian Canadians in sentiment' and who, in spite of the mistreatment received, 'went on to make great contributions to Canada' (2011). Concurrently, 2011 coincided with the publication of a play (*Paradise by the River*) by Centaur Theatre's playwright-in-residence, Montreal-born Vittorio Rossi, and the staging of a play by Vancouver-born Lucia Frangione (*Fresco*). Both offer the perspective of Canadians of Italian descent; for more information, see p. 276, 'note 10', *Conclusion*.

Sanfilippo 2010). Asians were similarly looked down upon (Guglielmo and Salerno 2003). Anticipating the large post-war influx of immigrants, an Anglican church report applauded the sturdy character and assimilability of northern Europeans, portraying them as far more adaptable to Canada's 'northern latitudes' and political institutions than either Asians or Italians (Gabaccia in Guglielmo and Salerno 2003:52; Schneider 1998). The latter, in particular, were depicted as 'amenable to the fallacies of dictatorship,' 'less versed' in democratic traditions, and thus better suited to the hot climate and 'fragile' political structures of Latin American nations (Gabaccia in Guglielmo and Salerno 2003:52).

Echoing the position of Italy's long-gone positivist intellectuals, many Canadian officials showed a particular antipathy towards southern Italians (Gabaccia 1984; Mangione 1993; Schneider 1998). Such views, steeped in centuries-old assumptions about the 'Germanic' roots of northern Italians and the Mediterranean customs of their southern counterparts, were backed up with race-based immigration policy. They were also kept alive by federal officials who commented repeatedly on the 'backwardness' of southerners and worried that they now outnumbered the 'more industrious' northerners whose emigration from Italy was essentially brought to a halt by the economic boom which invested northern Italy in the 1950s (Smith 1997).[19] In 1949, Laval Fortier, commissioner for overseas immigration, wrote:

> The Italian South peasant is not the type we are looking for in Canada. His standard of living, his way of life, even his civilization seem so different that I doubt if he could ever become an asset to our country. (10)

Along with such nativist positions, Canadian immigration policy was still largely linked to work opportunities available to Italian men and the material conditions of both Canada and Italy:

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[19] For more on the Italian economic boom and its impact on emigration from Italy, see Toniolo's *Oxford Handbook of the Italian Economy* (2013).

Canada needed unskilled and semi-skilled manpower as a result of economic expansion and labour shortage, and Italy had a torn economy. Italy had the opportunity to become a leading supplier of labour. Also, Canada was facing an international political pressure. On one hand, stood the huge expanse of Canada with a population of only twelve million and a need for people for both economic and geopolitical considerations. On the other hand stood a defeated Italy with a population of 47.6 million and the worst unemployment in Europe. (Bagnell 1989)

It is not a coincidence, then, that most of the early post-war arrivals were men, many of whom preceded their families to Canada. Large numbers came to Toronto and Montreal, while women, who were still ascribed an inferior status by immigration laws as the legal dependants of their husbands or fathers (Gabaccia 1984), did so via more circuitous routes (Schneider 1998). Even so, women and children were no longer officially forbidden entry to Canada (Pivato 1996:14). The growing Little Italies of Toronto and Montreal acted as a magnet drawing extended family and assorted *paesani* [fellow villagers] to the city. Southern Italians on either side of the Atlantic kept each other informed of changes in Canadian policy and adjusted their strategies accordingly. As government officials at the time remarked, with grudging admiration but increasing anxiety: '[s]outhern Italians are immigrants *par excellence*, readily pursuing every available option for gaining entry into Canada.' (Gabaccia 1984:12)

Indeed, many candidates followed several routes before finally gaining their exit visas for Canada. Particularly during the early post-war years, Italian immigrants entered the country through sponsored immigration. The new regulations allowed the first wave of Italian immigrants to Canada to sponsor the immigration of any relative or friend, providing a job was waiting for them. Not only did the policy reactivate the migration networks that had previously linked Italy and Canada, and had been interrupted by the advent of Fascism and war, it effectively promoted the development of enlarged social systems:

The pre-war Italians in Canada wanted to sponsor their families and relatives. It is reported that these inquiries started in 1946. In 1947, according to the law, Italians

who were Canadian citizens would apply for the entrance of the first degree relatives. (Bagnell 1989:129)

In January 1948, Canada opened an embassy in Rome, and, by the fall of 1948, Ottawa had expanded its categories of eligible kin to include not only close relatives – for example wives and brothers – but also more distant ones such as orphaned nephews and the spouses and the children of sponsored relatives. (Bevilacqua et al. 2002)

From the immediate post-war opposition to Italian immigration, through the mechanism of sponsored immigration Canada suddenly emerged as one of the largest receivers of Italian overseas immigrants, and the country enjoyed one of the lowest repatriation rates among overseas targets. By 1971 more than 460,000 Italians had arrived in Canada, and three out of every five of them came to Ontario and Quebec, the two most popular provinces of destination (Salvatore 1999:40). It was Toronto that emerged as the single most important Canadian target for immigrants from Italy. While the earliest arrivals came in the late 1940s, the first major influx of Italians arrived during the 1950s (Census Canada 2013). Between 1951 and 1961, close to 90,000 Italians, or 40 per cent of the more than 240,000 Italians who entered Canada in these years, settled in Toronto (Census Canada 2013). Another 33,000 Italians came to Toronto by 1965; and by 1971, 38,760 more had arrived (Census Canada 2013). By 1961 the Italians had replaced the Jews as Toronto's largest non-British ethnic group, and Toronto had replaced Montreal as the home of the largest Italian population in a Canadian city. Since 1941 Italians had quadrupled their numbers in the City of Toronto to 78,000; another 60,000 lived outside the city limits (Census Canada 2013).

Large Italian enclaves started to emerge across the country in the 1950s, the fastest growing of which were in Canada's two largest cities, Toronto and Montreal. Italian immigrants who went to live there had to put up with similar mistrust, and with significant economic and political challenges. Even though, culturally, Toronto and

Montreal represented the two souls of the bicultural nation, Italian immigrants had little interest in participating in the cultural life of the two cities. Up to the 1970s the main dividing line across Canada was the non-charter status of the immigrants and their religion. As Catholics and immigrants, the children of Italian (and Irish) immigrants were sent to English Catholic schools, but the choice to assimilate into Anglo-Canadian society[20] was left to the individual in both cities. This situation continued until Bill 101 was passed in 1977, when a different division, mainly linguistic, emerged.

In Toronto, Italian immigrants who arrived in the city after 1947 settled primarily in immigrant reception areas east and west of the downtown business core. Most came from southern Italy, and attached considerable importance to home ownership. Typically, they purchased relatively inexpensive housing, undertook extensive renovations, and rented parts of the house to other people from their home countries to pay the mortgage. Many were employed in the construction industry and used these skills to renovate their houses. At the same time, these immigrants revitalised the commercial structure of the areas in which they settled by establishing ethnic businesses (Bagnell 1989; Salvatore 1999). They also developed their own cultural organisations. Many of these immigrants capitalised on the increased equity in their inner-city houses to buy more modern and spacious houses in the suburbs (Salvatore 1999). There, they often formed spatially concentrated residential enclaves and developed new or relocated ethnic businesses and institutions (Salvatore 1999).

Just as in Toronto, after 1947 Montreal attracted many Italian immigrants, predominantly from the Italian South. The Montreal that welcomed the second wave of immigration from Italy was a dynamic industrial city, while the agrarian population of

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[20] See, pp. 24-5, *Introduction*; the story of Marco Micone will provide further evidence in support of this (pp. 137-42).

Quebec was in steady and rapid decline.[21] The Francophone bourgeoisie and its press were far from sympathetic to Anglo-Canada, but their interference was neither as widespread as had long been supposed, nor was it exclusive to Quebec. At heart, Quebec and Anglo-Canada cordially ignored one another.

The initial location of Italian immigrants in Montreal, up to the early 1990s, is reflected in the traditional 'immigrant corridor' along Boulevard St-Laurent, and in Mile End and Park Extension. As in Toronto, these immigrants placed a high value on home ownership and the development of a vibrant ethnic economy. For the most part, they bought 'plexes' (duplexes mainly). According to Capacchione:

> The plex housing in Saint-Leonard is an anomaly in Montreal's landscape […].
> This is often contrasted with "exotic" or "imported" forms of architecture, such as
> the bungalow [in Anglo-Canada]. […] During the period that Italians were
> building multi-family homes with white-brick facades, columns, arches, and
> gardens; when they were converting their basements into second-apartments or
> cantinas to make wine, sausage, and tomato sauce, the rest of the island was
> building single-family homes. (2013)

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[21] Anglo-Canadian cultural historians accord Quebec a controversial role, right up until the 1960s, as 'a backward place, under the complete domination of a reactionary church and of Anglophones who were as rich as they were racist […] A land of peasants, clerics and clerks.' (Myers et al. 1998:22) That French-speaking Quebec was allergic to industrialisation and capitalism, which it left, through a mix of choice and necessity, to the Anglophones, is a myth partly based on reality. However, French Quebec was also energised by a powerful current of liberalism, about which too little is said. Steadfastly modern, convinced of the necessity of separating church and state, active in business, these Québécois may not have been numerous, but they were noticeable nonetheless. Their opinions showed up especially in large-circulation newspapers such as *La Presse* and *Le Soleil*. For a long time, this strain of history went unreported by national sources, whose reports were based on the analyses of *Le Devoir*, the Catholic hierarchy's favourite daily newspaper. According to the generally accepted version of Quebec's history (Dickinson and Young 2003), the province sank into a social, cultural, and economic black hole after the defeat of Louis-Joseph Papineau and the Patriots (1837–1838), and remained plugged in it until Jean Lesage came to power 122 years later, and the process of the Quiet revolution began (see *Act II*, 'note 21'). The version of *la Grande Noirceur* of Maurice Duplessis has been spread widely among most Anglo-Canadian and Québécois intellectuals, politicians, and artists. Yet, according to national statistics (Statistics Canada 2013), 1950s Quebec responded quite well to the challenges of the time to the point where French-speaking Quebec had at least nine banks and 57 per cent of the owners of manufacturing businesses in Quebec were Francophones.

For the Italian immigrants in Montreal, who, like those in Toronto, valued home ownership over everything else, the plex system provided an ideal form of housing, especially once they began putting up family and *paesani* from Italy. This feature would provide Marco Micone and Claudio Cinelli with the main source of inspiration for the setting of their plays.[22]

The increased spatial concentration of the newcomers and their inherent diversity presented significant challenges in creating inclusive and welcoming communities in both Toronto and Montreal. These challenges included coordination between all levels of government, employers, and the non-governmental sector. The reality was that immigrants ended up settling in places where they had family and friends and where there were other people from the same country and cultural background who spoke the same language and adhered to the same religion.

Did spatial concentration always mean a lack of assimilation in this period? It is difficult to gauge the degree to which these enclaves resulted from Italian immigrants having decided to live with their sponsors or ethnic group or from discrimination. According to Losacco:

> Historically, segregated enclaves have developed around shared cultures that bound communities together […]. It's a matter of choice. (2003:20; translation mine)

Several members of the second wave of immigration from Italy, who were interviewed by Losacco in 2003, said their goal was to live in a decent neighbourhood, regardless of its composition (25). Others relied on their network of friends, especially those who, having spent more time in Canada, could act as a sort of job centre (88); indeed, friends and landlords would always look to employ fellow Italian immigrants before anyone else (88-9). In some cases, city officials and fair housing advocates said

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[22] See the relevant sub-sections in *Act II* and *III* respectively.

Italian immigrants who wanted to move into either Anglophone or Francophone neighbourhoods were 'deterred by fire-bombings or warnings painted on sidewalks' (25). But, more often, they and others said, the discrimination was more subtle: 'I've had incidents where when you get there you're told it's rented already' (26), said Giovanna Amato, a southern Italian immigrant who arrived in Canada in 1951. 'When it happens two or three times and you see the area is somewhat more populated with Canadians, you feel maybe it's not the right place to live.' (28) Michele Loverso, a retired police officer who arrived in Canada from Calabria in 1952, still expresses shock when he recounts how he and his wife, Anna, a registered nurse, were denied an apartment in a section of Toronto that was subsequently rented to an Anglo-Canadian couple working for the City Council (30).

As a reaction to or effect of all this, immigrants from Italy started to recreate their own everyday working-class cultures in specific areas of Canadian cities which, in Harvey's words, 'were deemed suitable by bank mortgage officers [Canada] and house owners [Canadians]' (1986:23). Torontonians and Montrealers sometimes viewed settlements of immigrants as transplanted Italian villages, but only rarely were urban enclaves homogeneous. While most urban neighbourhoods and rural settlements of Italians in Montreal and Toronto were multi-regional mixes of immigrants, clusters of Sicilians, Neapolitans, and Calabrians could still be identified. And although the second wave of immigrants left behind a unified nation, a democratic republic as of 1946, regional ties between immigrants were still stronger than allegiances to the newly constituted Italian Republic. Yet the second wave of immigrants was different still from the first: the war, twenty years of living under Fascism, the rise of mass political parties in Italy, and universal basic education had created immigrants who were unlike those who left Italy for Canada under the constitutional monarchy:

> To the newcomers they [the pre-war immigrants] were […] 'umbertine' that is, fossils of the Age of King Umberto (roughly the equivalent of 'Victorian'). The old timers, in turn, found the greenhorns […] obtuse and ungrateful. (Bagnell 1989:130)

The enclaves that emerged in Montreal and Toronto in 1950s functioned as melting pots that made 'Italian Canadians' of millions of Italian immigrants possessing only family-, village-, and region-based identities. New linguistic pidgins mixed Italian regional grammars with Canadian vocabularies, and by the 1950s and 1960s the foodways, folk devotions, saints' cults, proverbs, and marriage and family customs of the many and strikingly diverse regions of Italy had emerged in force. The result was a freshly minted folk culture that seemed Italian (especially to Torontians and Montrealers) but was also made in Canada:

> [w]hether southern Italians (the majority of migrants) or rural northern Italians, few of them spoke the language of Dante. Ambitious, hardworking, and shrewd, the mass of migrants introduced Canadians to an Italy that few tourists or intellectuals had ever encountered. (Bagnell 1989:131)

Post-war Italian immigrants were neither the enlightened makers of high culture – those imagined descendants of Dante, Boccaccio, or Petrarch revered by Canada's finest historians and writers such as Edmond de Nevers, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Robertson Davies – nor the culturally impoverished barbarians they had been made out to be by the northern Italian scientific positivists 50 years before. Backyard gardens filled with tomato patches and skimpy olive trees, a variety of domestic rituals, and large Sunday meals bringing together family, *paesani*, and relatives, were all starting to characterise Little Italies in Canada. Women making lace and decorating altars and small shrines to chosen saints, and men employed in construction using their skills to build and to renovate domestic spaces, populated the streets of these colourful enclaves (Losacco 2003). Even in tenement districts, Italian immigrants raised small animals, while, in the basements of their Canadian houses, the art of preserving tomatoes and other vegetables was almost universal, as were the

fermenting of home-made wines and the practice of hanging salami (Losacco 2003). Yet those were not the key elements that Canadian observers would typically identify as being part of Italian immigrant culture early in the twentieth century. Attention to those details came only later, as *Act II* of this thesis will show.

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Torontonians and Montrealers instead focused negative attention on the 'dire, public street life, food, noise, and large swarms of children' (Salvatore 1999:45), while their intellectuals were hard-pressed to reconcile the high-cultural stereotypes of Italy that were the product of tours to Roman ruins, Renaissance art museums, and Catholic cathedrals, or of visits to the local exhibitions and occasional opera performances, with the brash folk culture of the Little Italies.

In any case, few Torontonians and Montrealers had neither the language skills nor the personal sympathies that might give them access to the lived, everyday folk cultures of Montreal's and Toronto's Little Italies. Commentators focused instead on what they saw in public, which was routinely viewed as 'distressingly dirty and noisy'. Michel Tremblay's play *Les Belles-Sœurs* (1968) encapsulates this perfectly, with the sisters casting their Italian immigrant neighbours as unclean, sexually promiscuous, and generally 'strange':

DES-NEIGES VERRETTE : […] Prenez l'Italienne à côté de chez nous, a pue c'te femme-là, c'est pas croyable ! *(Les femmes éclatent de rire.)*

LISETTE DE COURVAL, *insinuante* : Avez-vous déjà remarqué sa corde à linge, le lundi ?

DES-NEIGES VERRETTE : Non, pourquoi?

LISETTE DE COURVAL : J'ai rien qu'une chose à vous dire : c'monde-là, là, ça porte pas de sous-vêtements !

[…]

LISETTE DE COURVAL : La pudeur, y connaissent pas ça, les Uropéens ! […]Vous
avez rien qu'à guetter la fille de l'Italienne quand elle reçoit ses chum … euh …
ses amis de garçons … C't'effrayant c'qu'elle fait, cette fille-là ! Une vraie honte !
Ça me fait penser, madame Ouimet, j'ai vu votre Michel, l'autre jour…

ROSE OUIMET : Pas avec c'tc puante-là, toujours !

<div align="right">(Act I, pp. 27-8)</div>

[DES-NEIGES VERRETTE: […] Look at those Italians next door to me. You
wouldn't believe how that woman stinks. *(They all burst out laughing)*

LISETTE DE COURVAL, *insinuating*: Did you ever notice her clothesline, on
Monday?

DES-NEIGES VERRETTE: No, why?

LISETTE DE COURVAL: Well, all I know is this… Those people don't have any
underwear.

[…]

LISETTE DE COURVAL: Modest! A European? […] Take a look at that Italian's
daughter when she brings her friends around... Her boyfriends, that is… It's
disgusting what she does, that girl. She has no shame! Which reminds me, Mme
Ouimet. I saw your Michel the other day…

ROSE OUIMET: Not with that slut, I hope!]

<div align="right">(Act I, p. 105; trans. J. Van Burek and B. Glassco)</div>

The Italian neighbour is perceived as an intruder whose primary function is to
reassure the disparate group of working-class, Québécois women of their superiority.
To them she looks dirty and dishevelled, and her behaviour appears shameless.[23] Of
course, this scene (thanks to its tone and purposefully placed stage directions) is
redolent of local colour. Italian men, women, and children alike were often seen
participating in a bustling street life that included vivid street theatre, market
histrionics, and casual socialising (Losacco 2003; Iacovetta 1992). Journalistic
observers such as Gregory Clark, in numerous humorous articles, claimed to have
uncovered 'artistic predilections even among Italian street urchins, youthful
speakers of Torontonian slang, and swarthy Italian men or women with colourful
scarves who sang as they worked outside on stoops, sidewalks, streets, and parks

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[23] Tremblay's bourgeois characters would aim more memorable jibes at Italian immigrants in
Montreal, twelve years later, in his *L'impromptu d'Outremont* (1980).

on sunny days.' (Clark 1952)

At the time, Italian Canadians, mostly male, would gather on College Street in Toronto or on rue Saint-Zotique in Montreal, in front of Italian bars and cafés, to listen to football games on the radio and pass the time in camaraderie (Boissevain 1970; Spotts and Wieser 1986:56). In many instances this form of public culture, which demonstrated the immigrants' need for a familiar gathering place similar to the public space of an Italian town piazza, was at odds with conservative Canadian notions of public space (Spotts and Wieser 1986:45). Numerous stories still persist in the memories of older Italian immigrants, of Toronto and Montreal policemen telling groups of Italians to 'move along' or 'break it up' as they stood listening to 'the soccer' and chatting after Sunday morning Mass (Nardi, 30 October 2009; De Nardo, 23 July 2011; Scotto, 23 July 2011).

Early representations of Italian immigrants in postbellum Canada illustrate, as Fratta explains in the seminal work *Italies imaginaires du Québe*c, a shift 'de italophilie à italophobie' [from Italophilia to Italophobia] (Fratta and Nardout-Lafarge 2003:x). Russo calls attention to the oblique but significant comparison Charles Fanning draws between the Italians and the Irish Canadians who had moved into the Toronto area after the Irish famine in 1846, pointing out that 'the benevolent attitudes Canadians had held toward Italian immigrants before the 1880s dramatically changed once Italian immigrants began to settle en masse in Toronto and became aliens on Canadian soil' (Fanning in Allen and Russo 1997:272).

Those Italians who settled in the two industrial metropolises of post-war Toronto and Montreal from 1947 onwards underwent a transition from being European farmers in post-war, poverty-stricken Italy to becoming proletarians in an urban industrial

economy. Especially for former southern peasants, and even artisans and shopkeepers who had once laboured in their own homes, the nature of the family economy changed profoundly on their arrival in Toronto and Montreal. Here, men and women became immigrant wage-earners 'selling their labour power outside the home, and their lives were deeply influenced by the demands and rhythms of their work and family worlds' (Palmer 1982:7). Clashes were inevitable, as in the labour disputes of the late 1950s and early 1960s (which Tony Nardi would use as a backdrop for *La Storia dell'Emigrante* in 1979).[24] External factors also impinged on their lives in so far as they were forced to adjust and adapt not only to the occupational world, but also to the city's other residents, including those Italian old-timers who belonged to the pre-war community (Salvatore 1999:35), and to the institutions and social caretakers of the host society. And although Toronto's and Montreal's association with Italian immigrants proved to be enduring, it was not until the 1950s that the volume of Italian immigrants seriously began to challenge the character of the two cities.

IV

It should not be forgotten that, unlike for the first wave, negative historical contingencies impacted on the second wave of Italian immigrants, and many second-generation Italian Canadians came of age during distinctly difficult times. As previously mentioned, the Second World War, various nativist theories, and a raft of economic and political restrictions sharply diminished both the assimilation and the influence of the immigrant newcomers, causing Italian Canadian cultures to emerge as a separate entity from the 'new' country, and, just as importantly, as divergent from earlier constructions of Italian Canadian identities by pre-war Italian immigrants, the 'old-timers'. Conversely, the specific material conditions of living in Canada also

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[24] See *Act II*, p. 131, 'note 14'.

caused Italian folk cultures to diverge significantly from Italy's. One way of mapping the contours of the Italian Canadian communities in the post-war period is to discuss the associations that emerged in Toronto and Montreal during this time.

In July 1954, a report compiled by the Canadian embassy in Rome declared on its very first page that the new immigrants had shown little interest in joining the formal organisations of the Italian Canadian community. 'The 50,000 Italian immigrants in Toronto,' it read, 'have the opportunity to belong to one of thirty-eight organizations; however, only […] 6.5 per cent of them participate in an Italian association or group.' (Bagnell 1989:131) Noting that most of the community activists were old-timers, the report concluded by encouraging the newcomers 'to get involved.' (Bagnell 1989:131) Not surprisingly, the earliest efforts to build formal institutions within Toronto's and Montreal's post-1947 Italian Canadian communities were initiated by Italian Canadian old-timers, many of them successful businessmen and professionals or political activists anxious to rid older Italian Canadian communities of their pre-war associations with Fascism. As explained in an issue of the *Eyetalian Magazine*: '[w]hile efforts at building a community-wide associational life would eventually bear fruit, in the period immediately following the Second World War such efforts were hampered by tensions that in these early years characterized relations between the prewar Italian Canadians and the newcomers.' (1995)[25]

As Bagnell and Harney have observed, such rivalries and tensions were characteristic of many different ethnic groups in cities across Canada (1989:23; 1986:40). Jeremy Boissevain has documented the case for Montreal's Italian Canadians:

> In the spring of 1954, for example, the Vittorio Emanuele Society hosted a banquet with the stated aim of meeting new arrivals and helping them to gain confidence in the new society, where they can hear the expressed voices of old Italians. When newcomers joined the organization, tensions developed when old

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[25] For more on the *Eyetalian Magazine,* see *Act III*, p. 198.

timers sought to consolidate their control over the executive positions. When one newcomer was elected to the position of secretary of a regional organization, the president, who was the son of one of the club's founders, objected so strenuously that the newcomer left the group. (1970:21)

Because the meetings of these societies were frequently conducted in English, some newcomers also felt excluded from the proceedings and soon abandoned these organisations. Another significant example is offered by a 1957 meeting of pre-war and post-war Italian Canadian community members in Toronto, where the difficulty of choosing a language of business – English or Italian – emphasised the difference in identity between the two migration cohorts (Harney 1986:43).

The first attempt by the largely pre-war Italian Canadian leadership to rally Italian immigrants around a common cause was made in 1958, revolving around the return of the former Italian Consulate at the corner of Dundas and Beverley Streets in Toronto (Casa D'Italia, which had been confiscated during the war by the RCMP). While the meeting reflected the interests of those who came to Canada before 1945, the campaign was significant because it was the first attempt to create an Italian Canadian sense of community overcoming social and political divisions, and relieving some of the humiliation and fear that had previously befallen Italian Canadians, especially their leaders, who were denied their rights as citizens and forced to mask their cultural heritage in Canada during the Second World War. (Spotts and Wiser 1996).

Many of the older societies, continuing to draw on old-timers, failed to regain their pre-war status. As Harney observed: 'the once popular pre-war associations […] – which by 1947 had resumed its meetings – did not succeed in these years in shaking their prewar association with Fascism.' (1986:42) Because of pre-war Fascist involvement in many associations, the institutional structures in place before the war were either disbanded or discredited. Populated with pre-war immigrants and their

Canadian-raised or Canadian-born children, these associations did not appeal to the newcomers.

The overwhelming numbers of new Italian immigrants in Canada in the post-war period, coupled with their differences from the pre-war Italians, were perhaps the more decisive factors that led to the indifference shown towards older Italian Canadian associations by the newer Italian immigrants. Paradoxically, connections with fascist Italy were still alive in post 1947 immigrants, but they were of a different kind, i.e. they had very little to do with Italy as a totalitarian state and pertained to the more private domain of individuals, their families, and immediate communities. Indeed, in Fascist style (Gilmour 2011:101), newcomers invested more in the fulcrum of family as a source of moral purification; father-dominated, mother-centred, and procreation-oriented, family became their main point of reference. Community-wise, 'Catholic parishes, mutual support societies, local unions, and Italian-language newspapers replaced former institutional nodes' (Bagnell 1989:151) for immigrant community formations. Efforts were geared towards preserving ties with Italy through Italian Canadian non-profit organisations which had no president or Fascist-echoing bureaucratic apparatuses:

> Italian-language theatre, opera, comic reviews, puppet shows, and eventually films – many of them produced in Italy or by peripatetic performers from Italy – all replaced former community concerns and managed to draw the newcomers in the largest Little Italies of Montreal and Toronto. (Losacco 2003:45; translation mine)

Even for the 'sweatbacks of Europe' (Harney 1986:43), work was not a be-all or end-all, and moments of leisure and creativity were possible. Indeed, evidence suggests that the newcomers were eager to find ways to enjoy their limited leisure time, showing an interest in preserving and celebrating their Italian heritage, and recreating a sense of community made of next of kin, family, and *paesani* who would increasingly overlap with the wider communal world of parishes and clubs.

Social outings and formal meetings would form an increasingly substantial part of the lives of many immigrants, particularly men. By the early 1960, for example, newcomers had begun to get more involved in public life. Most tended to do so at a local level, joining a regional club or a soccer team. (Losacco 2003; Iacovetta 1992) Yet it was above all the local Italian Canadian cultural association, and the various neighbourhood cafés and clubs, that would grow rapidly in number over the next two decades. The post-war welfare state had largely eliminated the need for immigrants to finance their own self-help schemes – a need that had prompted an earlier generation to create mutual benefit societies and credit-sharing ventures (Esposito 1993b; Iacovetta 2000). This facilitated the emergence of less lucrative activities within the community, and clubs and cultural associations essentially became important gathering places, with annual dances and picnics which provided an opportunity for everyone to participate.

A sketch of the post-war associational life of Italian Canadians must also be seen in the context of language. Italian became the favourite means of expression for the newcomers, but, as mentioned earlier, theirs was a curious mix of Italian dialects and Canadian English (Gibb-Clark 1984:M3). Therefore, any discussion of the language of the second wave of immigrants from Italy has to start from the premise that they brought their regional dialects, not Italian, to their new home. What happened to the different dialects once they came in contact with English? As I have already said in my *Introduction*, a separate study would be necessary to illustrate in full the different forms of linguistic interference with English. For the purposes of this thesis, I find Danesi's succinct definition of the emergence of a common language – Italiese – particularly useful:

> Italiese does not have a single form; it is shaped by a continuum of Italian dialects, all of which share a large common core and are mutually intelligible, though they reveal the influence of English […] There really appear to be two competing nativization forces at work: a dialectally-based one, which

characterizes the language of the home, and a more general one, which characterizes the Italiese used in the ethnic community at large. (1984:113)

That Italiese cannot be considered a new dialect of Italian seems clear on historical, linguistic, and social grounds. Historically and linguistically, standard Italian was changing in the 1950s; the dialect speakers living in Canada were not entirely involved in this change. This is why Italian sociolinguists refer to the Italian spoken abroad as 'ai margini della lingua' [at the margins of the language] (Menarini 1947; translation mine) since the varieties abroad did not participate in the diachronic change that characterised Italian in Italy in the 1950s. Socially, the dialect speakers' reality was Canadian, not Italian, so their national referent was Canadian English and not Italian.

The main result of this process was that the speakers had at their disposal two distinct varieties (Gibb-Clark 1984:M3): one, a dialect-based variety, was used at home, with the family; the other, dialect- and Canadian-English/French- based, was used in situations of contact between different dialect-based varieties, for example in Italian Canadian food-service stores, restaurants, travel agencies, businesses, and construction factories, and in the local Italian-language newspapers which, already in the late 1950s and again later in the 1970s, were prevalent in Toronto and Montreal. Important for my purposes here, the latter was also used in the plays produced in this period within Toronto's and Montreal's Little Italies, which contributed to making these works early examples of Italian Canadian theatre.

V

How can the emergence of a self-standing Italian Canadian identity, with its independent language and cultural networks, find its explanation in Canada between the 1950s and 1970s? As suggested by William H. New, 'Canada was otherwise engaged' (1989:197), fighting to emerge as an autonomous nation, with

its own culture poised between its two Anglophone and Francophone souls. In seeking to explain cultural emergence in Canada in its widest context during the mid-twentieth century, no document is more representative of the era than Governor General Vincent Massey's report in 1951, commonly referred to as the *Massey Report* (short for the *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*).[26] The *Massey Report* was the result of a government survey commissioned to consider the cultural state of Canada after the Second World War. The five-member committee embarked on a two-year countrywide information-gathering tour. All this was part of an effort by the Canadian government to consider culture not just as a leisure activity, but as a nation-building tool. As former Governor General Vincent Massey, whose Royal Commission led to the formation of the Canada Council, wrote: 'The answer to the problem we held was not negative, but positive – the strengthening of our own re-sources in the field of the arts and letters, and a deepening of confidence in what we can do for ourselves.' (Canada, 1951) While acknowledging 'foreign influences', emphasis was placed on the 'need to listen to – and develop – [Canada's] own voices.' (Canada, 1951)

The Canadian Council for the Arts dedicated numerous resources to promoting the idea of a grassroots culture. Literary critic Edward Brown had addressed this very question in his study *On Canadian Poetry*, published as early as 1943. Brown began by examining 'the psychological factors [...] against which the growth of a Canadian literature must struggle' when confronted with Britain, Europe, and the United States, and observed that:

> [A] colony lacks the spiritual energy to rise above routine [...] It lacks this energy because it does not adequately believe in itself. It applies to what it has standards

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[26] Other possible contributing factors have been cited: the financial and artistic success of the Stratford Festival; the impact of television drama; the funding and leadership of the Canada Council; a middle class with increased leisure and cash; and the national self-confidence generated by Expo 67 (Hammill 2007; Marra 2004; New 1989:137-212).

which are imported, and therefore artificial and distorting. It sets the great good place neither in its present, nor in its past nor in its future, but somewhere outside its own borders, somewhere beyond its own possibilities. (14)

It has already been noted how the psychological and material conditions of Canada as a cultural colony struggling to survive had become an integral part of national self-understanding.[27] The *Massey Report* was only too eager to change this situation, and it could rely on the support of a vast group of Canadian intellectuals to help their national culture emerge. This joint effort culminated in the establishment of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963 and the Official Languages Act in 1969.[28] The role played by Canadian theatre in the process should not be underestimated. Even so, between the 1950s and 1960s, as no theatre projects were recommended by the *Massey Report* to receive public monies for future growth,[29] the role of the theatre in the emergence of bicultural Canada remained fairly marginal.

This should not come as a surprise. 'Theatre [...] as something of value to a discerning public has never counted in the life of Canada,' (24) lamented Nathan Cohen in 1959. 'Nor is it likely to in the reasonably foreseeable future,' (24) he concluded bleakly. The legendary *Toronto Star* theatre columnist, notorious for alienating people with his sharp and biting style,[30] was not far from the truth. Seven years after the publication of the *Massey Report*, the by now late critic's pessimism was neither unique nor unfounded. Worse than this provocation was the brute fact that Canadian theatre did not resonate outside the theatrical event itself. Instead, it would contribute to nurturing the country's two solitudes (MacLennan

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[27] See pp. 22-3, *Introduction*.

[28] See pp. 15-16, *Introduction*.

[29] Despite this, Canadian theatre scholars seem to concur that the *Massey Report* inspired the theatre community to pursue nationalistic themes in their art. See: *Brief to the Advisory Arts Panel and the Canada Council from the Playwrights' Committee of ACTRA* (1971).

[30] This was largely due to his frank criticism and refusal to compromise his critical standards (Edmonstone 1983).

1945), with New going so far as to claim that: 'in 1960 Gélinas [was] practically alone in being translated into English, just as […] translations of English-language plays into French [were] essentially non-existent' (1972:7). With this in mind, it is no wonder that theatre continued to suffer, while the mass communication tools of radio and television were accorded far greater significance and given most access to public money by the Canadian Council of the Arts.

Given such a seemingly incontrovertible scenario, not even the most optimistic visionary could have anticipated that, within a dozen years, a coast-to-coast chain of twenty-three Anglophone and Francophone companies would offer over six thousand performances in a single season (1971-2), and that around three thousand of these would feature Canadian plays. Without a hint of exaggeration, David Peacock, Theatre Officer with the Canada Council, could assure *The Montreal Star* in 1973 that 'Canadian theatre is no longer just an idea, a case of wishful thinking, or a dream. As of now it's an established fact' (Peacock in Galloway 1973:A2).

To reflect upon the emergence – more accurately, explosion – of Canadian theatre since 1960 is, according to Robert Allen, 'to witness a cultural miracle; and miracles have a way of defying critical explanation' (Allen 2007:31). Between 1966 and 1971, several theatre institutions were founded, among them Playwrights' Workshop, Montreal, and the Centaur Theatre. The particular popularity of workshops reflected a repositioning of the artist as worker, professional, and creator of beautiful and useful products. The Francophone community was alive with creativity that expressed and explored national identity: the songs of Beau Dommage, the plays of Michel Tremblay and surrealist Claude Gauvreau, the novels of Marie-Claire Blais and

Réjean-Ducharme. The Anglophone community, meanwhile, was celebrating David French, David Freeman, Michael Cook, and the early work of Sharon Pollock.

To identify likely ingredients, however, is not to discover a recipe; time and critical distance have given Canadian Studies that. The baby boom, Expo 67, which celebrated Canada's centenary and attracted 50 million visitors (mostly in Montreal, where the exhibition took place), were all key factors in this cultural change (Hammill 2007; Marra 2004). Yet what proved to be the cornerstone of the present theatre structure in Canada was laid in November 1960 when the bi-lingual National Theatre School opened in Montreal with thirty-one students. 'The creation of the school,' notes Knowles, 'symbolizes the artistic maturity of the men of theatre in Canada and of their sincere desire to accept their future responsibilities' (Knowles and Lane 2006:3), while historians like Morton make vigorous claims that 'those men wrote one history; not two histories, but one history, as there are not two Canadas, or any greater number, but one only' (Morton 1972:89).[31]

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[31] Neverthless, a third of those individuals were being prepared for a non-existent job market. A year later Canada Council (1972) noted the bleak future faced by NTS graduates, but the solution it proposed was to increase employment rather than restrict the supply of actors. 'A National Theatre School' (21), it argued, 'demanded a national theatre' (21), but not in the sense of a single company located in an architectural monument in one major city. Rather, 'the essential of a national theatre, as we see it, is that it should reach a national audience - even if this audience must for convenience be broken down into regional audiences'. (21) The goal of a frankly regional, as opposed to self-consciously national, theatre released a torrent of creative energy in communities across the country. While there were theatres in various regions, to say that by 1971 regional theatres existed throughout the country would be inaccurate. Few companies grew out of existing community organisations, nor did any widespread local demand bring them to birth; rather, as Knowles and Lane point out, 'they were imposed by the enlightened few upon the unsuspecting many' (2006:10). Yet it is much to their credit that most of these cultural transplants successfully overcame initial rejection symptoms, and some became true regional institutions. Most are now playing lengthy seasons, and actors have established permanent homes in the communities they serve. Tours of schools and outlying centres are commonplace. Many companies now offer classes for amateurs, assist young playwrights, work in local universities and colleges, and arrange theatre-appreciation programmes (Allen 2007). While establishing the root structure necessary for long-term survival, many regional theatres still exist financially on a day-to-day basis. The flowering of regional theatres has in no way inhibited the proliferation of fringe festivals, just as mainstream theatre has inspired a third element in the Canadian theatre dynamic: underground or alternative theatre (Allen 2007).

VI

At the same time, Morton's statement sheds light on the relative cultural isolation of Italian Canadians between the 1950s and 1970s. According to Harney (1986) and Bagnell (1989), Italian immigrants were, at least on the face of it, oblivious to the birth of bicultural Canada. This seemed even more evident in the early post-war era, during *festa* celebrations and support meetings within the newly-established Italian Canadian cultural associations, which marked an important date on the cultural calendar of the new wave of immigrants from Italy (Harney 1986; Scardellato 2007). The enthusiasm and sense of community with which they helped organise and energise such events suggests their commitment to recreating familiar cultural mores – even at the risk of attracting the disapproval of intolerant casual observers from the outside. Summer evenings spent with their children on their verandahs and Sunday afternoons around the kitchen table eating and talking with friends remained the main source of recreation, along with holidays, weddings, baptisms, and confirmations, which were occasions marked by parties that drew together relatives, distant kin, *paesani*, and neighbours alike. (Bagnell 1989)

Along with family-centred celebrations, it became similarly important for the new wave of immigrants to share their values with extended circles of immigrant friends and family networks, as well as with those of *paesani*, which would often provide the newcomers with their main source of entertainment and sense of community. As a result of all of these interactions, a deeply felt need for culture and community that went well beyond the confines of household and workplace started to emerge within the Italian Canadian communities of the time.

Another important development was the opening of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on 2 June 1969.

It is possible to attribute this emergence, at least in part, to the process of sponsorship that the Canadian authorities had introduced in 1948 to facilitate the influx of immigrants (Losacco 2003:82). Since this new mechanism allowed Italian immigrants to enter Canada on condition that either a relative or a friend already resident in the country was willing to act as guarantor to cover their expenses in the first period of settlement, sponsorship effectively promoted the development of enlarged social networks connecting kin and country. The downsides of the sponsorship policy – isolation, socio-cultural fragmentation, and the persistence of identity linked to the departure areas – have already been outlined. Yet there is no doubt that, during these years, many Italian immigrants from across the different regions of Italy were starting to spend their precious moments of leisure time in attending community events during which, as in the case of the *festa* celebrations in particular, the harsh realities of people's lives were momentarily forgotten among the camaraderie and generous outlay of food and drink. Such colourful celebrations emerged as the most common way in which immigrants of the time would maintain their cultures and recreate community, even though support meetings held in Catholic parishes and cafés were similarly popular.

Since one of the values common to these events was that of community, the inherently social nature of community-based theatre made it a particularly attractive genre for Italian Canadian cultural associations of the period looking for a creative outlet for their stories. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to differentiate between more vernacular forms of community-based theatre, which centred on translating and preserving Italian heritage in Canada, and a more academic type aimed at working through specific issues within the Italian Canadian communities. In the case of Italian Canadian community-based theatre of the period, the style of production might have varied, but the subjects of the plays were largely consistent in their relevance to the audience. All were designed, that is, to reflect the audience's own

reality back to them. By the 1950s, Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and in Montreal had produced the major forces that would drive community-based theatre in the coming decades. On the one hand, there were Amilcare Zanini, who held sway as 'Segnor Pulcinella', a nickname aimed at celebrating his Neapolitan origins, and Agostino Venier, who created the Italian immigrant character sketch artists. On the other, there were the drama clubs, of which Bruno Mesaglio's Piccolo Teatro di Toronto was the most prolific, and the one which left the most lasting impact on Italian Canadian community-base theatricals, with its activities lasting for over 21 years. Many professional liaisons, marriages, and business partnerships took place around these individuals, helping to create a strong theatrical network the foundations of which can still be found in the work of Italian Canadian playwrights today.[32]

Amilcare Zanini (1928–1972) and Agostino Venier (1920–1969)

Amilcare Zanini was a Neapolitan who had played secondary roles in a company of actors touring South America. His intention was to remain in Toronto only long enough to earn his passage back to Italy (Zacconi 1962:2067). Zanini began performing comedy sketches in the church basements[33] and auditoriums of Toronto's Little Italy, becoming so successful that he soon abandoned all plans of returning to Italy. Zanini's first recorded performance in Toronto's Little Italy took place on 18 April 1952, when he directed and acted in a comedy, *Maria Giovanna e la famiglia dell'ubriacone* (*Maria Giovanna and the Drunkard's Family*). Archival sources document that he was noted for his uncannily accurate portrayal of intoxication (Zacconi 1962:2067). Initially, Zanini's drunkard experiences the pleasant effects of alcohol: his eyes are bright and he seems to hear birds singing. Then his eyesight becomes slightly impaired, distances are

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[32] See *Act III*, p. 256.

[33] The parish church of St Agnes, in particular, was a central institution in the theatre of the growing Italian Canadian community of Toronto (Scardellato 2007:22).

blurred, and the drunkard seems to move in a surrealistic world. Gradually he attempts to get hold of himself, but he ultimately yields to a general paralysis of the limbs, and stands stupefied centre stage, swaying interminably back and forth, staring helplessly out at the audience.

In the following sketch, the totality of Zanini's performance, and how it involved the audience, seems rather telling:

> Ne sera dentro na barra a Toronto dove il padrone era canadese, lo visco canadese, la birra canadese, ce stava una ghenga de loffari tutti canadesi [...]
> 'iu laico chistu contri?' 'No, no! Mi laico mio contry!'A questo punto me chiavaieno lo primo fait! 'Dice: Orre for Canada!' lo tuosto: 'Orre for Italy!' Un ato fait. 'Dice: Orre for Canada!' 'Orre for Italy!' N'ato fait e n'ato fait, fino a che me facetteno addurmentare; ma pero, orre for Canada nun o dicette!
> Quanno me scietaie, me trovale ncoppa lu marciapiedi cu nu pulizio vicino che diceva: 'Ghiroppe homma!' lo ancora stunato alluccaie: 'Canada nun gudde! Orre for Italy!' Sapete li pulizio che facete? Mi arresto!
> Quanno fu la mattina, lu giorge mi dìcette: 'Wazzo maro leste naile?' lo risponette: 'No tocche ngles.' 'No? Tenne dollari.' E quello porco dello giorge nun scherzava, perche le diece pezze se le piggliae!

> [One evening in a bar in Toronto where the owner was Canadian, the whisky was Canadian, the beer was Canadian, there was a gang of loafers, all of them Canadians […]
> 'You like this country?' 'No! No! I like my country! I like Italy!' At this point they gave me the first punch! 'Say: Hurray for Canada!' I said instead: 'Hurray for Italy!' Another punch 'Say: Hurray for Canada!' Hurray for Canada' Another punch, then another punch, until they knocked me out; but I never said, 'Hurray for Canada!'
> When I came around, I found myself on the pavement with a policeman nearby who said: 'Get up, you bum!' l was still stunned: 'Canada no good! Hurray for Italy!' Do you know what the policeman did? He arrested me.
> When morning came, the judge asked me: 'What was the matter last night?' I responded: 'I don't speak English!' 'No? Ten dollars' And that pig of a judge wasn't joking, because he took ten bucks from me!]

> (Zacconi 1962:2067; translation mine)

Zanini's exaggerated gestures and pretended intoxication did not tone down the sense of injustice suffered by Italians at the hands of Anglo-Canadians. In their attempt to coerce the immigrant to say 'Hurray for Canada', the Anglo-Canadian 'loafers' show their sadistic side when knocking him unconscious. Anglo-Canadian authorities seem equally unjust when the immigrant is subsequently picked up for vagrancy and brought

to court. The Italian immigrant's assertion, 'No tocche ngles,' earns the quick retort from the judge: 'No? Tenne dollari'; and the immigrant is thus forced to pay a fine.

That Zanini's sketch contains an element of criticism of Canada for its unfair treatment of the immigrant is evident when the judge is compared to a 'porco' though Zanini's real intents appear to have been different, and the epithet could, in fact, conceal frustration. According to Claudio Cinelli, whose work, by his own admission, has been influenced by Zanini and Venier (28 July 2011),[34] Zanini had a deep concern for the plight of the uneducated immigrant. The immigrant in this sketch appears rather naïve, with his blind love for Italy and his sense of helplessness. Of course he is a broken man and Italiese, as a combination of Italian dialect and broken English, only adds to the immigrant's own liminality. Yet the small sketch is as much about linguistic identity as alienation. For Zanini, overcoming this whole sense of estrangement and vulnerability necessarily involved a certain stripping away of the Italian linguistic identity (Cinelli, 28 July 2011), long before the late-twentieth-century rubrics that would seek to engender bilingualism, biculturalism, and, finally, multiculturalism.

Almarinda Venier, daughter of the great comedian Agostino Venier, who will be discussed later in this sub-section, recalls that the lines between the reality of life and the illusion of the stage were sometimes imperceptible to the audience (31 October 2009). She even recalls an instance when a group of spectators waited outside the theatre to beat up the actor playing the villain for his abusive treatment of the immigrant in the sketch (31 October 2009). This was how powerful Zanini's performances were for some, and there can be no doubt that both language and issue played an important part in the process. The communities that invested in Zanini's performances soon came to recognise them as an art form they could utilise to examine and address their own prominent issues. As in other contexts where community theatre was (and still is) used,

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[34] See *Act III*, p 225.

Italian Canadian plays of the period seemed to function predominantly as a medium for education.

Zanini is reported by Almarinda Venier as having embodied the quintessence of the charming Neapolitan with a lively personality (31 October 2009). A critic for the Toronto-based Italian-language newspaper, *Corriere Canadese*, described him as 'uno di quei [sic] attori camaleontici in cui cambi rapidi di parrucche e costumi tanto dilettano il pubblico' [one of those chameleonic actors in whose rapid change of wigs and costumes audiences so delight; translation mine] (1952:TA) However, it was in Zanini's production of *L'Uomo Ammazato* (*Executed Man*, 1956) that the entertainer most clearly demonstrated his gift for improvisation, and, to a certain degree, his positive outlook on life. The play ends with the central character about to be executed, but the spectators at its premiere were angered at the brevity of the play and demanded more. Zanini raised the curtain and a scene was instantly improvised: the man's execution was fortuitously prevented by a pardon from the governor. The curtain descended, but the greedy spectators still would not be satisfied:

> The curtain was raised again, and a tender scene between the pardoned hero and his overjoyed mother was enacted. Still the spectators demanded more. The fiancee rushed into this scene of maternal bliss and embraced her lover. Anticipating his customers' expectations, however, Zanini raised the curtain again for a final *tableau vivant:* a joyous wedding involving the entire cast. (*Corriere Canadase* 1952:TA)

The *Executed Man* was also remarkable as an example of early Italian Canadian theatre. Prior to 1947, when ties to Italy were still strong given the different immigration patterns,[35] plays by Italian playwrights were performed almost exclusively (Zacconi 1962:2067). Gradually, work emerged that reflected self-standing Italian Canadian traditions (Grohovaz 1983:47) and the *Executed Man* can be regarded as the epitome of this. It suggests the hardships of immigrant life and the difficulties of adjustment – but leavened by a note of optimism: a poor Italian has been unjustifiably

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[35] See above, p. 56.

condemned to die, but Zanini's improvised ending implies that in Canada justice is available to rich and poor alike. The governor, symbol of Canada, is a benevolent father figure who saves an innocent man from death and so assures the continuance of the sacred institution of the family, represented by the joyous mother and the triumphant wedding.

First and foremost, however, the early forms of Italian Canadian theatre that emerged from the Italian Canadian communities of the period seemed to reflect their respective audiences' needs to go to the theatre expecting to be entertained and to socialise. Houselights were always partially lit during performances to allow for a ready exchange of conversation between members of the audience (Venier, 31 October 2009). There was eating, drinking, and the accompanying din of pop bottles rolling under the seats. The hardworking labourers went to the theatre, either alone or with their families in tow, to escape the reality of their lives, to be reminded of home by hearing familiar folk songs, ballads, and operatic arias, to hear Italian spoken as well as their own regional dialects, to laugh at the antics of their own regional stock character from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, to be stirred by patriotic sentiments, to be moved by the emotions played out on stage, and to be reassured by the well-ordered universe depicted in the play. The average audience, it can safely be said, was quite dispassionate, or at best ambivalent, about whether a production was educational or socially relevant. Tony Nardi, whose life and works will be analysed in the next chapter, provides a vivid description of an Italian Canadian audience during his childhood, with boisterous people talking to the actors, singing, laughing, and weeping:

> The local theatre was filled with all sorts and conditions of men and women, working men in their shirt sleeves for it is summer, women with slick hair parted over their oval olive faces suckling their babies, or with half nude infants lying over their knees. Boys in white coats, with baskets of multi-colored pop and other forms of soda water pass up and down the aisles seeking customers, and you see young mothers, young girls with their young men, grey haired grandmothers

tightly bound in thick black shawls in spite of the heat sipping the red and pink and yellow pop through long straws directly from the bottles […] all this observed in the smokey half light of the darkened theatre for the performance going on is to the highest degree picturesque […]. (Nardi, 30 October 2009)

The humorous satire of Agostino Venier represents prevailing attitudes among Italian Canadian audiences at the time, and is widely regarded as one of the most effective examples of the ways in which Little Italies at the time used theatre to socialise (Venier, 31 October 2009). The Italian immigrant character Venier created typically performed the comedy skit known as a *macchietta*, a musical sketch combining sung verses and spoken prose passages. In this type of skit, Venier impersonated and satirised community figures recognizable to his audiences. His was a comic stock character, a *caratterista*, in the tradition of the Commedia dell'Arte; only this character, instead of originating in Naples or Bologna or Calabria or any other Italian region, emerged from the heart of Montreal's Italian Canadian community and spoke broad Italiese. The Italian immigrant was the typical newcomer of the time, the bewildered greenhorn trying to make his way in a strange and inhospitable country. Education was an incidental by-product of Venier's *macchiette* or characterisations. His character showed the immigrant how to avoid being duped by thieves, while his parody of *Il Presidente della Società* cured many old-timers, former community leaders, of their habit of wearing pretentious military uniforms at public functions.

Agostino Venier's depiction of the *cafone,* the country bumpkin helplessly adrift in the New World, was comparable to Chaplin's Tramp: the little guy full of good intentions and ambitions, but, similarly to Zanini's immigrant character, victimised by society and his own ineptitude. Newcomers and older generations of Italian immigrants attended Venier's theatre, and the popularity of his sketches was unparalleled in any other non-professional spectacles available to audiences within Montreal's Little Italy at the time (*Corriere Canadese* 1952:TA; Venier, 31 October 2009). Venier was a *machiettista,* a comedian whose art, derived from the Commedia dell'Arte, consisted in

ridiculing the social stereotypes of the period. His comic sketches, by extension, became the paradigmatic Italian immigrant community skit and provided a vast panorama of characters drawn from the life of Little Italy: the undertaker, the watchman, the soldier, the patriot, the domineering wife, the anxious bride, and the inevitable *cafone.* A review in *Corriere Canadese* chronicles Venier's virtuosity:

> A transformed Venier enters, from hair to shoes he is an Italian concert hall singer of the type familiar in Montreal. He has transformed his eyes; his nose is new; gesture, voice, all his powers, physical and mental are moulded in a new metal. He shrieks his vapid ditty in a raucous falsetto; he flicks his spangled skirt; he winks at the orchestra leader, and shakes his buttocks; his bosom has become an enormous jelly. Again he is gone but soon the figure of an Italian patriot appears, a large florid person with heavy hair and moustache. Across his chest, over his shoulder, and ending in a sash at his hip, he wears a tricolor of Italy. (1963:SA)

Venier paints the man in action, forever marching in parades, forever making speeches at banquets, forever shouting 'Viva l'Italia!' As in all good caricatures, and in line with Zanini's own beliefs, this is not only a comment on the issue at hand; it is powerful physical comedy, a provincial portrait that becomes easily recognisable. Audiences of the period all knew that character in one guise or another. Venier was a keen observer of immigrant life, and his *macchiette* constitute a major contribution to the first forms of Italian Canadian theatre. As social documents of a kind, they perhaps afford a more complete insight into the life of the communities than any history book alone, mirroring the overcrowded realities of Italian immigrants to the big Canadian cities. His *macchiette* were sharp satires depicting the foibles of Italian Canadians, their guile as well as their gullibility, which often made them victims of unscrupulous opportunists.

Mapping Venier's career as an Italian Canadian theatre practitioner invariably means tracing his roots back to his Italian homeland where, as his daughter, Almarinda Venier, explains, 'he started writing plays and creating characters at the age of eight' (31 October 2009). However, it would be a good while before Venier arrived in Canada. He was born in 1920 near Venice, of a Neapolitan mother and a Venetian father, and his familiarity with both dialects would be vital to the language he would later use in his

improvisational work. Venier first graduated from the Accademia Teatrale Veneta and travelled down south, settling for a while in Naples. His daughter explains that it was there he began to explore his interest in cabaret and the art of solo performance (31 October 2009). Cabaret was the perfect medium for Venier, who, when on stage, was equal parts singer, dancer, and stand-up comedian. He modified the genre to his own tastes by blending it with popular theatre techniques that stemmed from his Venetian education, which was shaped both by Commedia dell'Arte and Carlo Goldoni's Venetian comedies.[36] This enabled him to portray a wide variety of parodic, larger-than-life characters that tell tragic-comic stories through monologue, improvisation, and different dialects, the elements that define his theatre work.

After his family had immigrated to Hamilton in 1948 to speculate in coal mining, Venier decided to leave Naples to be with his parents. From Hamilton, he moved to Montreal, but he could not support himself as an actor (Venier, 31 October 2009). Having received an excellent formal education in Italy, Venier easily found employment in Montreal's Italian Canadian community. He obtained a position in a bank on St. Zotique (the southern side in the quadrilateral border of Montreal's original Little Italy), advising immigrants in financial matters. Venier's daughter explains that, along with his upbringing, it was his Montreal job, his 'coming into contact with other Italian immigrants', that gave Venier what she calls the material for his 'chameleon-like work…to gain the capacity to transform himself according to place […] whether it was Venice, Naples, Sicily or the very Little Italy in Montreal.' (Venier, 31 October 2009).

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[36] Carlo Goldoni (1707-93) is one of those key cultural figures whose career sheds significant light on the artistic structures of his own time (Stanton and Banham 1996). Although his work drew heavily on the conventions and character types of the Commedia dell' Arte, his plays were more directly narrative, and had at their heart the practicalities of human dilemmas – love, sex, and money, along with much reference to local Venetian customs (Stanton and Banham 1996). On the most basic level, Goldoni's plays of erotic confusion and social and financial advancement, such as *La locandiera* (1753), were precursors of the libretti provided by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838), eventually founder of Italian North American studies in the United States, at Columbia University in New York (Pivato 1996). It is thanks to Venier that Goldoni's work, deeply rooted in Venetian culture as it was, filtered through Italian Canadian theatre.

For Venier, there was little doubt that Montreal's Little Italy would eventually become the place of long-term settlement. The legend goes that, during his lunch hours, he frequently attended the nearby *café chantant,* and that one afternoon, quite spontaneously, he entertained the audience in a street performance with a song and a comic sketch based on an Italian immigrant character he had previously helped (Venier, 31 October 2009). The success of his performance was instantaneous, and he decided to leave his job to replicate the experience within Montreal's bars in Little Italy (Venier, 31 October 2009). Prior to his arrival in Canada, Venier's only theatrical experience had been as a theatre student. He would regularly take part as an understudy in the performances of the great Venetian *machiettisti,* in the tradition of Carlo Goldoni and Commedia dell'Arte, thus familiarising himself with the art of the comic theatre, and as a cabaret performer, for a brief period of time, in Naples.

According to his daughter, Venier was not only a natural performer, he was also a skilled craftsman (31 October 2009). Rehearsing long hours before a mirror, Venier precisely planned and executed every gesture, dance step, line delivery, and vocal inflection. He maintained a workshop at home, where he taught himself the art of wig and mask making (Venier, 31 October 2009). Archival documents represent invaluable sources that help shed light on Venier's art. When constructing a mask, he began by carving a potato to serve as a mould for the nose that usually dominated the mask (*Corriere Canadese* 1952:TA; 1963:SA). Since Venier performed as many as six sketches in a half-hour routine, he devised a method for quick costume changes: the entire costume was constructed as a unit with snaps at the back. In later years, he was assisted by his son, who waited in the wings with wigs, costumes, and props. Everything was carefully synchronised so that the costume changes could be orchestrated into the entire act. The interlude for the costume change was used by the band to begin the musical introduction for the next sketch. Venier never used a

prompter, and flawlessly memorised his five hundred comic sketches (Venier, 31 October 2009). However, when he played in a sketch involving several actors, he himself often served as prompter, turning unobtrusively away from the audience to cue the other actors (Nardi, 30 October 2009; Venier, 31 October 2009).

Venier's sketches were closely based upon his eyewitness observations of local immigrant life. While sitting at a café, he mentally recorded the emotions, gestures, and idiosyncrasies of his countrymen. Possessing an excellent singing voice, Venier was famous for his parodies of Italian opera stars. One of his most popular impersonations was that of his friend, Enrico Caruso. Venier's mask and costume converted the great tenor into a swollen vanity. The sketch was performed in a single spotlight at centre stage, with the tenor sitting in his drawing room, quietly fuming over his reviews.

One of Venier's songs, 'Mr John' (1958), tells the story of an immigrant named Giovanni, who expects to find the streets paved with gold but discovers, instead, a society prejudiced against him. Unable to earn an adequate income, Giovanni becomes a bootlegger, makes a fortune, and earns the respect of both Italians and Canadians. Those who had previously disdained him now address him as 'Mr. John,' and for a thousand dollar bill 'the wretches' accord him more respect than the Governor (1958). Although the references in the song are dated, it retains the impact of a Brecht-Weill number: joyous music paradoxically contrasted by sombre lyrics; a sardonic, world-weary quality uniquely Italian in its cynicism yet universal in its appeal. The song is Venier's denunciation of a society's cruelty and hypocrisy, which forces honest men into dishonest professions.

The snapshots of Italian Canadian life created by Venier would demonstrate the prevailing feeling of bewilderment of Italian immigrants in a foreign country, while Enrico Caruso, the bandleader, the president of the social club, the Irish-Canadian, the greenhorn or hick, the wet nurse, the opera diva, the schoolgirl, the soldier boy, the

bride, the street cleaner, the iceman, the fireman, the singer, the dancer, the soubrette, the policeman, the gangster, the bootlegger, the undertaker, the street vendor, the Irish cop, and many more, comprised the entire panoply of Italian immigrant society in the 1950s. They earned their creator the title of 'King of Impersonators', or 'King of the character sketch,' among the Italian Canadian community in Montreal. Venier was well known to Italian Canadians in Montreal, but he also toured to the Casa d'Italia in Toronto. Venier's creations, in particular, and his theatre in general helped ease the tensions and anxieties of a community in the process of being fashioned. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Italian Canadian theatre of the period played an educational role within its communities. The history, literature, and culture of Italy were paraded across the stages of Little Italy, as well as the life of its communities as these latter were beginning to take shape.

Bruno Mesaglio (1911–77) and Il Piccolo Teatro Canadese di Toronto

As previously mentioned, Italian Canadian theatre of the time was not as intensely political as community-based theatre is often intended to be, nor was its focus on aesthetics. Instead, it was more likely to be found in educational venues for Italian Canadian members of their respective cultural associations. Italian Canadian clubs across Canada, notably in Toronto and Montreal, held numerous support meetings designed to find solutions to the many social problems that plagued their communities. Such meetings were attended by members of a community who were often not in agreement with one another, and the agendas of these gatherings almost always featured community theatrical productions that confronted and explored these issues (Harney 1985, 1986). Philip Taylor's definition of the kind of community-based theatre that took place in these meetings, which is based on Alan Read's, captures their atmosphere: 'a […] theatre form in which individuals connect with and support one another and where

opportunities are provided for groups to voice who they are and what they aspire to become.' (Taylor 2003:xviii)

To that end, Italian Canadian communities often partnered with drama clubs within Italian Departments at university level to create community-based theatre, and most of the experiences that developed from such partnerships came to life through Il Piccolo Teatro Canadese di Toronto or, as it was commonly shortened, Il Piccolo Teatro (Scardellato 2007). It is significant that partnership was being sought among universities and university students of Italian in Canada. As Mesaglio's daughter told me in an interview:

> We are fertile minds from a living culture— ancient as well as contemporary. We are caught up on a wave of the cycle where, in our own words, we can approach the *preservation*, *recognition*, and *continuation* of our cultures. (22 July 2011; emphasis mine)

Italian Canadian theatre of the time seemed to embrace the debate among scholar-practitioners in the field of community-based theatre, fostering the transformative potential of theatre and advancing the cause of social justice (Read 1995; Taylor 2003).

'Don't ever forget where you came from' (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011) is a refrain that would punctuate the over seventy-five performances that Bruno Mesaglio and the students of his drama club put together, with the help of Toronto's Little Italy, over twenty-three years of activity of Il Piccolo Teatro Italiano. Where Mesaglio's students 'came from' is crucial to understanding the contribution of Il Piccolo Teatro to Italian Canadian community-based theatre of the period. Mesaglio was thirty eight when he arrived in Toronto with his wife; they were travelling from the Netherlands, where they had established an Italian drama club that specialised in performing plays in Italian (Grohovaz 1983:47). Mesaglio began his career as an actor when he was just sixteen, in Udine, northern Italy, but his theatrical skills were largely self-taught (Grohovaz 1983:47). He became involved with cabaret performances during the Second

World War, in an area of Italy where the war was particularly brutal and horrific, with the Italians fighting desperately to protect their national borders from Tito's attacks. Mesaglio's performances would alleviate the suffering and pain of the Italian contingent in the northern region of Friuli, while feeding the young actor with theatre material for his future community-based performances in Canada (Grohovaz 1983:47).

When Mesaglio arrived in Toronto, he had just started to write and help produce plays (Grohovaz 1983). Yet by the early 1970s his productions would number more than 200. Throughout his life, he remained enthusiastically involved with the many drama clubs that were active within the Italian Canadian community in Toronto, helping them stage plays by Goldoni, Pirandello, and De Filippo (Grohovaz 1983). Indeed, his debut as an actor was in a De Filippo play, in 1951 in Toronto: 'Sunday 6 May 1951, the players presented Eduardo De Filippo's *Non ti pago* […] with "the principal actor […] newcomer Bruno Mesaglio."' (Scardellato 2007:22). Shortly after, Il Piccolo Teatro was born, and Mesaglio could release his full range of creative skills, investing them in original Italian Canadian community-based theatricals.

Il Piccolo Teatro's earliest work was *Separazioni* (*Separations*) in 1953. It exemplifies Mesaglio's dedication to the Italian Canadian community in Toronto. *Separazioni* was a small, intimate performance that Mesaglio and his students would take to the homes of those who lived in the community. Hosted by the home owner, the event would begin as a social gathering of between five and fifteen people. Traditional Italian food would be prepared and drinks would be consumed. Only after the audience had had a sufficient opportunity to socialise would Mesaglio's students then begin to perform:

> The students entered the performance space [the kitchen] wearing the colors of the Italian national flag. They struck a series of poses, their facial expressions changing as they would cover their green-white-red clothes. Gradually, their

natural smile would be removed, becoming affected and ending in the desperate laughter of the recently imprisoned. (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011)

The fragmented narrative presented images from a childhood in Italy and the struggles of relocation, culminating with a scene of rebirth into a life of activism within the community in the new world. *Separazioni* emerged as a powerful educational tool, with many of its members becoming guest teachers and workshop leaders in local area schools, encouraging even more Italian Canadian young students to become familiar with their cultural and ethnic heritage. Several of these students joined Il Piccolo Teatro. Mesaglio was offering the Italian Canadian community in Toronto entertainment that represented a shared, socially empowering opportunity for reflecting on and defining collective histories.

Through the years, Mesaglio's students would themselves learn to become accomplished performers and storytellers. They would mix with Italian Canadian individuals of Toronto's Little Italy, observe their daily lives, and report on the cultural, ritual, social, and culinary traditions of their families. As most of the students, especially in the late 1960s, were Italian Canadians raised in Toronto's Little Italy, observations were often coupled with the more personal and familial recounting of experiences, stories, jokes, and proverbs to their classmates. Mesaglio's students would research their own family histories and retell stories that had been orally transmitted from one generation to the next. Mesaglio would ask them to pay particular attention to how an oral account of one's life melded the personal with the collective experience, the past with the present, and fact with fantasy. They would thus learn that, like memoirs, oral histories hold 'the truth of memory, suspended between fact and imagination, a narrative that has often been filtered through a multiplicity of accounts' (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011)

The students would constantly move from the voices of individuals to those of communities, learning about others while also speaking of themselves. Once students had reconnected with their individual and family histories through interviews, they would examine materials that dealt specifically with the history of Italian immigrants to Toronto. To this extent, students would read through official documents that chronicled the Italian presence in Toronto – the traditions of the feasts and the 1947 Civil Rights Audit (Toronto Forum), the latter highlighting real-estate prescriptions that made it more challenging for Italian Canadians and Asian Canadians to enter the housing market, either as renters or house owners, in certain suburban districts in Toronto. (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011) Students would then create short community-based performances, mixing English with Italiese, that took place at Italian Canadian meetings for the most part (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011), promoting community-building amateur theatricals while achieving the more particular objectives of their drama course.

After endless consultations, students would be allowed to display the materials they had gathered from their own research within Toronto's Little Italy and the Italian Department at the University of Toronto. In my interview with Mesaglio's daughter, she recalled that: 'one major challenge of preparing those performances for my father was the time-intensive initial work that had to be done to bridge the gap that existed between a campus community and the local community.' (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011) Before embarking on their research, students had to sign consent forms, approved by the University of Toronto's Institutional Review Board, which stated their rights and responsibilities as well as faculty expectations for student participation. At the same time, and to ensure the successful outcome of the project, Mesaglio and his students had to spend considerable time organising community presentations to

introduce the project and garner local support: 'they spoke at the groups' monthly meetings and invited members to volunteer to be interviewed' (Ms Mesaglio, 22 July 2011).

Representatives of Toronto's Little Italy of the period and Mesaglio's students would meet over coffee and cake at the club, where initial contacts and appointments for formal interviews would be made. Following best practice in oral history, performances would be scheduled and a script would be handed out to the Italian Canadian community members present at the support meetings. While the emphasis of the project was primarily on orality, during this part of the process Mesaglio would also focus on the writing component, taping the performance and working on the transcription of the play while trying to remain faithful to the structure and diction of the taped material. As Mesaglio's daughter states: 'the transcription of the performance heightened both students' and the community's senses of responsibility towards the content and empowered the community as an authentic writer.' (22 July 2011) In the process, Mesaglio and his students aimed to privilege the experiences of a group whose stories had remained untold and to counteract the loss of cultural memory in the community, as well as to challenge visible and invisible dividing lines between the community and Canada as a whole. As Edvige Giunta explains, 'Appropriating memory is a crucial step for those who feel they have limited access to public forums because of their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, sexuality, or class.' (2002:120) Augusta Saccucci, one former collaborator of Mesaglio's, and a representative of Toronto's Little Italy in the 1960s, shared with me her hope at the time:

> The neighborhood would become another type of thriving, interesting, close community, and perhaps these performances, and the publicity around them, would change the opinion some Torontians had at the time of Italian Canadians as

being just a blight on Toronto, and they would see the possibilities it has. (22 July 2011)

Unfortunately, she said she had had to wait 20 more years before this actually happened, when Tony Nardi and his mainstream theatre took centre stage in Toronto.[37]

Once performances had finished and transcriptions had been completed, Il Piccolo Teatro would use them to analyse storytelling techniques, the presence and importance of orality in theatre and everyday life, and the politics of representation. To the researcher, the result is a rich medley of voices relating accounts of personal, local, and national events. Sometimes diverging accounts of particular moments in Italian Canadian and American histories emerge; for example, accounts of the Second World War, the turbulent years of mass migration, female experiences, and generational differences. Indeed, like all oral texts and performances, these composite oral histories speak to the impossibility of what Mark Amodio calls the 'single, authorized version of a song against which the fidelity of all other versions can be measured' (2004:100).

Reactions to the performances varied among participants. Although some of them would find the time commitment burdensome and the process of remembrance uncomfortable, most would find the project rewarding. During one of my interviews, Assunta Scotto, a participant in the project, remarks:

If I had to do the project over, I would do it happily. I felt I was not alone in my experiences as an Italian immigrant. It opened my eyes to a world of other immigrants who shared my same concerns, a world of which I was not totally aware. (23 July 2011)

Another participant I interviewed, Dina De Nardo, comments on the value and time-sensitivity of the performances:

The most enjoyable part was meeting and listening to the stories of these people [...] I have been asking about and listening to my mother's own stories

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[37] See *Act II*, p. 130.

as one of 8 children of immigrant parents for years. I never tire of them and I always seem to get a little piece of new information that I never heard before. Our ag[ing] population is such a stronghold of information, most times when we are younger, we're too caught up in our own lives to pay attention or care, then by the time we do, it's too late and they are gone. (23 July 2011)

Other observations indicate that these participants would often see themselves in Mesaglio's students' stories. That self-discovery frequently accompanied these kinds of projects yielded rewards for facilitator and students alike.

The success of these initiatives can also be measured by how they motivated students and the Italian Canadian community to continue with the performances and to take the experience outside Toronto. A similar theatre group to Il Piccolo Teatro di Toronto started in Montreal in 1972, which offered students a self-designed internship or employment experience through the community centres for education in Montreal's Little Italy, and whose work was compensated through private and university grants. The experience was short-lived[38] due to the fact that, towards the end of the 1970s, the Italian Canadian community of Montreal decided to direct the funds for its theatre projects towards multicultural theatre exclusively. A similar destiny awaited Mesaglio and his students in Toronto, but their legacy has proved comparatively greater and longer lasting.

In the 21 years that they were active, Mesaglio and his students were instrumental in organising performances based on the oral histories of Toronto's Little Italy, to which community members were invited to be interviewed and to bring documents and photos that were shared and catalogued, thereby rebuilding invaluable archival material thas was lost or destroyed during the Second World War. In addition, these performances were pivotal in the organisation of the exhibits that opened in 2011 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the

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[38] It resumed its activities in 1997 through a different scheme within the revamped multicultural policy; see *Act III*, p. 173.

internment of Italian Canadians, where captions for photographs, documents, and artefacts, as well as digitised audio files, were identified and prepared.

Historian Iain Chambers argues that:

Open to histories, memories, and possibilities from elsewhere, identities cannot be lived in a state of understanding that is already fully established. They become points of departure, openings on the continual elaboration of becoming. (2002:29)

Another of Mesaglio's collaborators and interviewees, Di Geronimo, celebrates

[t]he enthusiastic response that our project has received from the Italian Canadian Community. Our work has stirred up many memories in this community, and, has served as a catalyst for many of these people to re-examine their family histories. (23 July 2011)

Indeed, as Rosemarie Rabasca, one of my interviewees, comments, her involvement with Mesaglio's students led her to start researching her family's history and eventually to reclaim her cultural and linguistic heritage: 'I am currently enrolled at the Language Institute to study Italian and I plan to take a trip to Italy in the future.' (23 July 2011) The events surrounding Il Piccolo Teatro di Toronto thus helped re-create a sense of community for the Italian Canadians of Toronto and to revalorise their experiences. With each interview, with each evocative performance and account, the identities of the Italian Canadian community, its storytellers, its student transcribers, its participants and observers alike were re-elaborated, reinterpreted, and reconnected.

IX

It is my belief that, when real communities – social groups engaged in sustaining their members' identities and aspirations through face-to-face interactions – dwindle in significance in people's everyday lives, the symbolic construction of 'community' assumes greater importance in theatre terms. Theatre has always created images of

community in order to shape and maintain a collective sense of belonging and self-worth, providing its audience with a 'communal forum [...], the necessary mediating element between individuals and society' (Knowles 2008:65). For these reasons, in broader theatre terms at least, it seems vital to discuss the challenge of celebrating unity while paying homage to difference and cultural exchange. More simply, it can be concluded that, to assert membership in a community, individuals must engage with both similarities and differences within their respective groups.

Together and over time, Italian Canadian communities, like other communities, have created boundaries between what and who is to be included in, and what and who must be excluded from, their own particular social group. They have done this, as suggested generically by Cohen, by agreeing on emotion-laden symbols that carry major significance for their lives (1985). Here the 'cultural, social, economic, and political' elements mentioned by Knowles in his definition of 'community-based theatre' come into play. According to Knowles (2001), who draws on Cohen's work repeatedly, it is not essential for community members to agree on the meanings of symbols to be represented on stage. Rather, says Knowles:

> Members need only use the same symbols to proclaim their uniqueness and sharpen their differences with others. The image of a local school mascot often evokes strong emotions but carries a variety of ideological meanings for community members. In the context of a school basketball game, however, it clearly separates "us" from "them." (250)

The symbolic work of community building is never done. Including some symbols and excluding others is a life-long task: parades, graduations, sports events, and school plays all provide potent performative symbols of 'communities'. Part of the reason for the success of Italian Canadian community-based theatre in the middle decades of the twentieth century was that it provided images for its audiences that helped them do the symbolic work of including and excluding those elements that constitute a community.

No performance by itself can alter the routines of everyday life, but Italian Canadian community-based theatre between the 1950s and the 1970s provided images of potential community, sparking the kind of imaginative work that must precede substantial changes in expected habits. How, specifically, might this occur in the performance of a community-based play? Part of the answer lies in what Kershaw, following Knowles, calls 'appropriate rhetorical and authenticating conventions for the performance' (1992:44). These conventions, 'the means by which the audience is persuaded to accept characters and situations whose validity is ephemeral and bound to the theatre [rhetorical]' (Kershaw 1992:45) and the semiosis of the play, the signs that 'model social conventions in use at a specific time and in a specific place and milieu [authenticating]' (Kershaw 1992:46), must connect the audience to the possibilities of community experience in their own lives. In other words, *how* the show communicates and *what* is communicated must draw on conventions that are locally familiar. In this way, residents can be induced to put their imaginations to work in the symbolic building of community during the show.

For Zanini, Venier, and Mesaglio, rhetorical and authenticating conventions included community-specific stories rooted in the locale, visual symbols drawn from familiar scenes, speech and diction patterns that called forth time and place, and ways of walking and gesturing that were specific to and easily recognisable by a group (Kershaw 1992:24-7). As theatre practitioners from within their respective Italian Canadian communities, they supplied hundreds of similar examples of rhetorical and authenticating conventions that proved highly successful in their performances. Many of these conventions were based in the oral traditions and practices of the community, in what Victor Turner call the 'oral-literate continuum' (Turner in Delgado 2003:229). Community-based theatre draws heavily, both in its creative processes and final performances, from the oral end of the spectrum. The well-told tale is at the centre of

most community-based theatre. Because the dynamics of storytelling are so deeply embedded in this form of theatre, the human voice – often regardless of the visual image of the speaking actor – and facial gestures have great power to evoke a web of sympathetic connections. And if the audience experiencing these narratives is attuned to orality, it may be able to accept several different kinds of performers as theatre practitioners for their community.

While this orientation to orality and the general conventions of community-based performance are clear enough in many descriptions of the form (Armstrong 2000; Cohen-Cruz 2000; Paterson 1990; McConachie 1998), the ways in which these factors are usually brought into play by the performers and implicated within a 'structure of feeling' typical of this kind of theatre are not. 'Regarding' (1995:63) is the term used by Read in his *Theatre and Everyday Life* (1995) to designate the primary activity of an engaged audience. From his point of view, spectators at a live performance do much more than look, hear, and consume when theatre is working as it should. Rather, they rely on their immediate feelings to make ethical judgments about the 'images' (1995:63) at work. These images, though initiated on stage, are part of an ongoing transaction, 'an economy of symbolic exchange,' (1995:63) between audience members and performers. The images that interest Read combine the nexus of bodies, props, and lights that form material images on stage, and mental pictures and sounds in the heads of spectators regarding them. Located in an idealised space between spectator and performer, these images oscillate 'between the material and metaphysical' (1995:62).

Read's insights, based primarily on Raymond Williams's, are particularly helpful in understanding the dynamics of community-based theatre that are relevant to this chapter. All theatre is local for Read, and is bound up with the ethics of everyday life. Ethics, meanwhile, 'defines a distance between what is and what ought to be. This

distance designates a space where we have something to do.' (1995:89) Read then goes on: 'This is the place where theatre occurs. Both ethics and theatre are concerned with possibility' (1995:90). Read sees theatre as the best medium to alter the face-to-face ethical relationships of community because it puts living people in a room together and asks them to imagine themselves in each other's shoes. A 'structural acquaintance' (1995:96) arises between the theatrical process of image creation and 'the dynamic of communities to imagine themselves' (1995:96). Read concludes, utopically, that:

> images and the imagination are the means through which the material needs of communities form and disperse. It is precisely through images that the first tentative transformation of everyday existing realities is first conducted (1995:101).

What seems distinctive about the experience of Italian Canadian community-based theatre of the period I am interested in here were both the kinds of images generated and what the audience did with them. Prompted by the various rhetorical and authenticating conventions that are a part of this kind of theatre, spectators were encouraged to turn their imaginations to the ethical relations that might constitute their local, day-to-day lives. As New puts it: 'community-based theatre puts people into critical positions and watches them make ethical choices'. (New 1972:6) Specifically, following Cohen (1985) and Knowles (2008), it is possible to hypothesise that audiences used the symbolic exchange of the theatrical experience to make judgments about which kinds of images to include or exclude from their communities. Community-based theatre, to them, was less about representing the realities of actual or historic communities – although markers of these realities needed to be present to 'authenticate' the experience – and more about imagining and constructing the relationships of an 'ethical community for the future' (Read 1995:102).

The aural and visual images generated in Zanini's, Venier's, and Mesaglio's performances collectively provided a structure of feeling that encouraged their

audiences to divide an ethical 'us' from an immoral 'them' and then to examine who 'we' were, almost in a self-congratulatory manner. As Read well knows, when spectators imagine the possibility of an ethical community, politics cannot be far behind (1995). Although this was certainly not a central concern for the type of community-based theatre I have discussed in this chapter, all the evidence suggests that it was mainly geared towards strengthening communities which were still regarded as unstable and temporary between the 1950s and 1970s. Italian Canadians who participated in community-based theatre were quite likely to be interested in local politics, while the kinds of imaginative choices about inclusion and exclusion they made while enjoying the performances often had the effect of strengthening their sense of community. If this is not directly relevant to my use of the term 'community-based theatre', its immediate consequence, i.e. that community-based theatre practices construct futures for their community (Read 1995), is. This is not to say, however, given the structure of feeling in Zanini's, Venier's, and Mesaglio's work – their images of community and their inducements to include and exclude – that the political implications were progressive; that conservatives and reactionaries did not have ethical principles that also contributed to forming the basis for an imagined community in the future. As I have been arguing in this chapter, experiences in community-based theatre at the time privileged the common good over personal freedom, group responsibilities over individual rights, and civic virtues over over-determined incentives – all values that foreground images of community and hence emerge from participation in community-based projects. It can be concluded that, with Italian Canadian community-based amateur theatricals in the mid twentieth century, stories were never 'just stories.' Their chief concern was to convey memory, history, belief, and tradition, which required active response from their audiences. By looking at issues within their respective communities, Italian Canadian theatre makers of the period urged their audiences to become involved in those

communities and to value a shared heritage from the similarities and differences within them. And as they did so, they made creative use of conventions, as much performative as dramatic, of a particular form of stage play.

ACT II[1]

As has been seen, Italian Canadian community-based theatre was instrumental in forging a community identity among early generations of Italian immigrants to Canada. The importance of Italian Canadian theatre doubled with the introduction of multicultural policies in the 1970s, which saw the emergence of an Italian Canadian theatre implicitly serving all Canadians and explicitly supported by the state. Tony Nardi's *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979) is not only chronologically the first multicultural theatre work by an Italian Canadian. It is also the first Italian Canadian play to have won a recognised prize, the Ontario Multicultural Theatre Festival as Best Original Canadian Play, in 1982. Similarly, Marco Micone's *Trilogie du silence* (1982-88) is widely regarded as 'marqu[ant] l'avènement de la parole immigrante sur la scène québécoise' [marking the appearance of the immigrant word on the Quebec theatre scene] (Molinaro 1999:118; translation mine). And, lastly, Caterina Edward's *Homeground* (1986), though written in Toronto, is the first recognised Italian Canadian play to document the lives and struggle of a group of Italian Canadians in western Canada.

The role of multicultural policies in this process cannot be overlooked; at the same time, such policies should be seen as contingent to a history that allowed the stories of Tony Nardi, Marco Micone, and Caterina Edwards, and of their work, to become part of the larger story of Italian Canadian theatre. A second, perhaps more fundamental, reason is that *La Storia* – as the title of the Nardi play is commonly abbreviated (Kaplan 1980:43; Mazza 1980:C9) – *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* are all shaped around a similar plot, form, and structure which help identify some

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[1] A portion of *Act II* was first published as 'Italian-Canadian theatre in the spotlight of multiculturalism: *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979), a case study' in 2013, in the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 26 (2), pp. 213-34.

common concerns to Italian Canadian theatre in the 1980s and are therefore crucial to its understanding. The common thread connecting these plays is their interest in self-referential themes, thereby bringing together the burgeoning of distinctive identity-based theatre practices with the growing awareness of what it meant to be an Italian Canadian in the 1980s. In Jürgen Habermas's terms (1998), we might see such plays as contributing to the fashioning of a 'subject-in-progress' (18), which he defines as the creation of 'a network of signifying practices and structural experiences imbricated in the historical *and* cultural shifting of the making of ethnic communities' (18; emphasis mine).

This chapter looks initially at Tony Nardi's *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979), which was the first Italian Canadian play to be acknowledged officially by a Canadian institution when it won the Ontario Multicultural Theatre Festival[2] as Best Original Canadian Play in 1982. It then goes on to look at Marco Micone's *Trilogie du silence – Gens du silence* (1982), *Addolorata* (1983), and *Déjà l'agonie* (1986) – and to assess its importance to Montreal's Italian Canadian community. The chapter concludes with Caterina Edwards's *Homeground* (1986), a play concerned with adjusting to life in western Canada while negotiating a new identity, one that was uniquely 'Italian Canadian in the prairies' (Pivato 1999:62). Rather than merely 'uprooting' and 'transplanting' its ethnic culture, Edwards's play combines aspects of the past with those of the present to negotiate a new culture. First contextualising *La Storia*, Micone's trilogy, and *Homeground* as different kinds of multicultural play, I proceed to offer an analysis of their main themes, underscoring the implications of what their writing meant to Italian Canadian dramatists like Nardi, Micone, and Edwards at the time, and suggesting these plays' continuing importance for both Italian Canadian theatre and

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[2] For more on the Ontario Multicultural Theatre Festival and its importance to ethnic groups and their theatre projects, see Di Giovanni (1983:112-18).

Canada now. The key argument is that the emergence of state-funded plays like *La Storia*, *Gens du silence*, *Addolorata*, *Déjà l'agonie*, and *Homeground* helped produce a sense of general psychological wellbeing and socio-cultural outcomes in those Italian Canadian communities who invested in theatre projects sponsored by multicultural policies from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s.

I

In 2003, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert published a comprehensive study of recent developments in multicultural theatre, a practice that incorporates 'narratives […] of adaptation, often using a combination of ethno-specific [elements] to denote cultural in-between-ness' (Lo and Gilbert 2003:34). Characterised by a 'commitment to cultural pluralism […] without necessarily confronting […] the dominant culture' (33), multicultural theatre attempts to bring about socio-cultural awareness in specific ethnic communities and it only cross-pollinates with national theatre practices when it suits the artistic desires of the communities themselves (34). Consequently, this form of theatre features aesthetics that are shaped by the culture of the community from which it originates and, according to the two Australian theatre scholars, it is also the most effective form of multiculturalism in terms of strengthening communities and achieving social change (34).

While Lo and Gilbert deserve credit for having attempted for the first time to set the terms of the discussion around multicultural theatre, a field which had long resisted definition in theatre studies (Barba 1991; Brook 1972; Carlson 1996; Schechner 1996), their article glosses over the different contexts in which multicultural theatre appears. It is true that, in Lo and Gilbert's terms, multicultural theatre carries politicised meanings and that it mainly pertains to those nation-states where multiculturalism is a political strategy, officially chartered in their constitutions (2003:34). Yet they seemingly

overlook the controversial role played by the nation-state in funding multicultural projects by ethnic communities, which is one of the main bones of contention when addressing multicultural works in conjunction with multicultural policies (Griffiths 1994; Hade 1997; Mac Key 2002). Within the context of my thesis, this means that the challenges posed by scholars and thinkers to multiculturalism as state technology (Griffiths 1994; Hade 1997; Kamboureli 2000; Žižek 1997) have been largely left out of the equation.

More recent work around multiculturalism and theatre has noted that though it is important to continue to evaluate multicultural policies and philosophies in critical ways, there is a danger that such critiques can serve to feed conservative agendas hindering scholarly debate around multicultural theatre itself (Knowles 2010; Mitchell 2004; Pradier 2008). As such, what is required is perhaps not so much a lack of (or further) discussion around multiculturalism as its critical reformulation. This is especially true in Canada, where discussion around multiculturalism is still important, but where negative attitudes towards multicultural policies and state-funded cultural projects have crystallised through the years (Griffiths 1994; Hade 1997; Kamboureli 2000; Žižek 1997). Indeed, Canadian multiculturalism as state policy has variously been critiqued for its essentialising, culturalist, and – despite its goal of more intergroup contact – segregationist tendencies (Hutcheon and Richmond 1990; Kamboureli 2000; Mac Key 2002; Siemerling 1996; Žižek 1997). In particular, the funding application of multicultural projects (up to 1997, when state-funds through the multicultural programme were discontinued) has been criticised for painting a folkloric picture of ethnic communities with their own distinct cultural traits such as food, songs, and costume (Hutcheon, Richmond 1990; Kamboureli 1996, 2000).[3] Stanley Fish, in his seminal 1997 article, goes so far as to coin the term 'boutique multiculturalism' (378)

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[3] I shall return to this, on pp. 171-4.

to refer to this phenomenon, a term which, for some, perhaps best approximates the incorporation of state multiculturalism into multicultural theatre in the 1980s in Canada (Knowles 2010).

II

Before delving into a close reading of the plays, it is essential to consider the context in which *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* originated by looking at multicultural policies themselves and their effects on Italian Canadian communities and Italian Canadian plays in the 1980s. 1972 saw the establishment of a federal Ministry for Multiculturalism in Canada, which enhanced government funding and offered possibilities for white ethnic minorities residing in the country to voice their own presence within the Canadian cultural scene (Bouchard and Taylor 2006). The stated purpose of the Ministry was to recognise 'the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society' (New 1989:218). Official multiculturalism had been established in Canada two years previously in 1971, when Pierre Trudeau stood up in Parliament and officially declared Canada bilingual and multicultural.[4] The Ministry promised to 'enhance the development' of these communities and to 'promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins'. One of the specific aims of the objectives of multiculturalism was to set up a system of payments to be distributed to the provinces of Canada[5] on the condition that

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[4] For historical overviews of the origins of multicultural policies, see Day (2000); Kymlicka (2010); Pal (1993); Resnick (2005); Taylor (1994).

[5] This system of payments would be later known as 'transfer payments' (Bouchard and Taylor 2006), a term used in other jurisdictions to refer to cash payments to the provinces of Canada. This system is different from the one the Ministry for Multiculturalism had set up, in that funds were distributed equally to all the provinces, while the Constitution Act of 1982 introduced the weighted mean, known as 'equalization'. Adopting this system would help guarantee 'reasonably comparable levels' (Bouchard and Taylor 2006) of health care, education, and welfare in all the provinces. Yet the definition of 'reasonably comparable levels' has more recently become the subject of considerable debate (Bouchard and Taylor 2006) as the richer Canadian provinces like Ontario complain that they are being discriminated against for being

those funds would be employed in cultural projects highlighting 'cultural difference' (Bouchard and Taylor 2006). Subsidising the costs of producing original work in and outside the national cultural discourse was an institutional sign that Canada was finally acknowledging the contribution of ethnic groups to the making of the nation; it also meant that such groups could be granted sufficient funds to sponsor a variety of culturally related projects, including theatre. Cultural agencies,[6] which had long been working independently on cultural activities for their immigrant communities, were offered arts funding to sustain themselves and to extend patronage to generations of young creative minds willing to embark on such projects.[7] Within Italian Canadian communities, which were ready to benefit from the system of payments set in place by the government, the Italian Canadian associations in Montreal and Toronto were particularly notable for their investment in a wide range of theatrical activities intended to promote Italian culture outside their communities while reflecting on their roles within the Canadian contexts in which they operated.

This process was facilitated by a new generation of Italian Canadian intelligentsia. Having graduated from Canadian universities and having acquired 'the tools' (Loriggio 2003:34) with which to express themselves in three different languages – English, French and Italian – they could easily negotiate their place in the diverse Canadian cultural scene.[8] Many of them resided in Toronto and Montreal, which was

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wealthier (Ontario receives less funding from Ottawa because its system of health care, education, and welfare is deemed to be in a better state than that in the other provinces).

[6] 'Cultural agencies' or 'cultural communities' were the terms with which the Federal Ministry defined these structures (Pivato 1994:50).

[7] The implementation of these policy objectives depended on the establishment of a network of government funding, but it also depended on the provinces' willingness to adopt multicultural legislation (the provincial legislatures are now allowed to override certain regulations for a variable period of time by the federal parliament; see The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the Constitution Act 1982). At present, six of the ten provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and Nova Scotia – have fully implemented the 1996 policy (see final sub-section of *Act II*).

[8] In the field of education young Italian Canadians approached the national average for post-secondary education, their numbers up dramatically since 1971. Yet a more revealing statistic

also where the vast majority of them grew up, calling attention to the centrality of their urban experiences as immigrants who came to Canada after their parents had abandoned predominantly rural lives back in Italy. They banded in local groups and, before long, in 1978, a young Antonio D'Alfonso set out to organise their work around Guernica Editions in Montreal, a small firm co-funded by the multicultural programme whose main aim became the publication of writing by Italian immigrants. D'Alfonso estimated that over a hundred people – poets, novelists, essayists, and playwrights – were at work on similar literary projects at the time. In the same year, seventeen of them became involved in an emergent community of scholars whose joint effort led to the publication of *Roman Candles*. *Roman Candles*, an anthology of Italian Canadian literature written and published by Italian Canadians, both inaugurated and cemented this newfound collaboration between scholars of Italian heritage. Part of their mission was to be considered integral to the national literary scene since their work was subsidised by the multicultural programme. Moreover, it not only acknowledged, but also responded to, the work of canonical Canadian writers. In that regard, in his preface to *Roman Candles*, one of its contributors, Toronto's poet laureate Piergiorgio di Cicco, contends that 'our work does not reject Atwood's theory of Canadian fiction, but rather enhances it. [...] What we are doing is expanding the tradition of 'survival' to include a tradition of 'the journey'. The difficulties of that journey are as much about survival as the struggles of English and French Canadians' (30). As the first recognised manifesto of Italian Canadian literature, *Roman Candles* formulated critical concepts of an Italian Canadian identity that could accommodate historical change in both the ethnic group and Canada while highlighting intersection points between *Italian* and *Canadian*.

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has shown that for people of Italian heritage between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, a higher percentage remained in school when compared to the totals in Canada, Ontario, and Toronto (Jansen 1988).

Through the 1980s, this new group of intellectuals became known as 'the Montreal-Toronto corridor generation' (Pivato 1994:25) because much of their time was spent and invested in travelling between the two cities, promoting their work through the sponsorship programme set in place by the multicultural programme. Tony Nardi, Marco Micone, and Caterina Edwards belonged to this generation of individuals. In 1983, Micone and D'Alfonso were among the founders of the journal *Vice Versa*, which embodied a veritable avant-garde at the time as it featured (mostly) theoretical work by Italian Canadians and other immigrant intellectuals in Quebec. A national organisation was also formed in 1986, the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. Its main aim was to bring together and to coordinate a national community of writers, critics, academics, and other artists who were willing to disseminate Italian Canadian literature and culture all over Canada, using the publishing industry to further promote it through the creation of anthologies and literary prizes. 'I do not believe immigration killed Italian culture,' D'Alfonso said, 'but we must work hard to preserve it. That is my whole purpose.' (D'Alfonso in Minni and Ciampolini 1986:226)

Even if they made up a unique group of writers, for the first time since 1947 some interesting differences emerged, especially between writers who resided in the Francophone milieu of Quebec and those who lived elsewhere in Canada. These differences were exacerbated by the coming to power in 1976 of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois, founded by René Lévesque in 1968: a secessionist party and its leader were now occupying strategic roles in Quebec's National Assembly (Dickinson and Young 2003). In 1974 Bill 22 of Robert Bourassa's Liberal Government had declared French the sole official language of Quebec, but had failed to establish efficient mechanisms to ensure implementation. The PQ's Charter of the French Language, Bill 101 (1977) enshrined the French language as the principal embodiment of Quebec specificity, entrenched the rights of the Francophone majority and set in place effective measures

for the establishing of French as the language of government, of employment and, not least, of education (Bourhis 1984; Dickinson and Young 2003:351-3; Killick 2000b:li).

This new legislation was of considerable importance for the immigrant population living in Quebec, and can be related to other developments, notably the creation of the Québec Ministère de l'Immigration in 1968,[9] and the according of special treatment to immigrants from Francophone countries. In the 1980s, with the children of all immigrants now legally required to attend French schools, immigration continued as a high-stakes political issue, being seen as a crucial means of increasing the size of the French-speaking community (Hobsbawm 1990:173). At the same time it became important to define the particular 'intercultural' form of a Quebec-style multiculturalism (Lester and Philpot 2005:223), firmly rooted in the notion of a Francophone community, as has been periodically attempted in Québec government documents such as the 1980 white paper entitled *Autant de façons d'être Québécois* and the *Policy Statement on Immigration and Integration of 1990: Let's Build Quebec Together*.[10] As noted earlier, these various decisions impacted heavily on the Italian Canadian community living in Montreal[11] and naturally they also reverberated with the theatre produced by ethnic playwrights in Quebec at this time.

III

The emergence of publicly subsidised projects brought Italian Canadian work to the attention of a wider, mixed ethnicity audience. Italian Canadian multicultural theatre, in particular, not only allowed Nardi, Micone, and Edwards to develop beyond community-building amateur theatricals, but also meant they could move beyond the

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[9] The Ministère de l'Immigration has since been replaced first with the Ministère des Communautés Culturelles et de l'Immigration in 1990, and then with the Ministère des Relations avec les Citoyens et de l'Immigration in 1996.
[10] Both in Myers's *Historical Studies of Social and Legal Regulation in Quebec* (1998).
[11] See *Introduction*, pp. 24-5.

immediate vicinity of their communities, both literally and metaphorically. Indeed, the very nature of these multicultural projects contributed to a push for distinctive identity-based works which overtly reflected on Italian Canadians as 'subject[s]-in-progress', addressing the ways in which Italian and Canadian cultures had combined to shape new meanings and values, new practices, and new relationships.

Nardi's *La Storia*, Micone's *Trilogie du silence*, and Edward's *Homeground* are all concerned with investigating what it means to be an Italian Canadian in the 1980s. Through an exploration of changes brought about by dislocation to a new country, generational conflict, social mobility and education, these paradigmatically multicultural plays reflect on what Italian immigrants brought with them to Canada, and how this affected their life in the new country. Meanwhile, their plot structures and linear chronologies are disrupted by past memories of Italy: the homeland that refuses to be forgotten and returns to disrupt the present in a number of different and telling ways. While the dramatisation of memory is often disorienting, transporting the spectator towards the playwright's native country, the psychic space of memory, or the site of myth, the plays also subvert identity discourse more fundamentally by representing the memories and culture of a minority on the commercial stage. In terms of form, Italian Canadian plays of the period were largely derived from European and Euro-American drama (Scambray 2000:16), employing a realism that echoed Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams, but they were also indebted to the *nouveau théâtre québécois* of the 1960s and 1970s as well as insistently reworking formal (socio-historical) and ideological (political) alienation in the Brechtian mode. This combination is vital to understanding Italian Canadian theatre of the 1980s. Such modes of representation were to Italian Canadian theatre of the 1980s what Grassroots theatre was to Anglo-Canadian theatre in the 1960s. Grassroots theatre helped Anglo-Canadian playwrights challenge the professionalised institution of English Canadian theatre, which was unduly

deferential towards European models. Likewise, both the content and the syncretism of realist forms in the Italian Canadian plays of the period had the dual function of legitimating aspects of an Italian Canadian culture and reframing the image of Italian immigrants produced in dominant culture at the time.

For some reviewers, the Italian Canadian playwrights of the 1980s were overly concerned with realism and the chronicling of immigrant experiences (Crew 1979:C9; Wagner 1990:B12). However, the choice was understandable. To the Italian Canadian playwrights of the 1980s, writing multicultural plays became *de rigueur* because, for the first time, they had been given the chance to present their own stories, their own communities, and their own histories in mainstream theatres to audiences that often had confused and controversial ideas of what an Italian Canadian and/or Italian immigrant was. Certainly, there was still a huge disparity between romanticised myths about Italy's rich cultural heritage, its sunny piazzas, architectural jewels, and contented peasants and the mud-covered trench diggers and haggard-looking female factory operatives that Canadians confronted in their own cities:

> With the arrival of TV and cheaper transatlantic flights, many more Canadians than ever before were attracted to the tourist's romantic image of Italy. However, that image talked to the Canadians more than it talked to the Italian Canadians. (Jansen 1988:23)

In a sense, the actual experience of mass migration to Canada from Italy was being glossed over; as Loriggio suggests: 'there seemed to be a mainstream project aimed at showing a polished image of Italy' instead (Loriggio 2004:30).[12] At least initially, many Canadians could not adjust this image so as to accommodate the overcrowded immigrant households and cluttered neighbourhoods that dotted their

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[12] Speculations that Italy was also involved in this process are slowly entering the discourse of the 'lost generation of Italians' (Loriggio 2004:32). It seems that Italy was unwilling to encompass images of dirtiness and ignorance. See Loriggio (2004:40) and Pivato (1994:57). Also, see *Act I*.

cityscape. Paradoxically, the few Italian clubs that publicly responded to criticism, and that sought to defend the honour of their compatriots, also drew on standard images of sunny Italy and pieces of Fascist propaganda. As one indignant Italian immigrant worker put it: 'don't these people know we come from the country of Michelangelo and Da Vinci and that we have the greatest opera singers and best architecture in the world?' (Loriggio 2004:30). However, they generally rejected the negative stereotype – that of possessing 'loutish and quirky qualities' (Loriggio 2004:30) – only to replace it with images of nostalgic simplicity. These images were mainly accompanied by stories of hardworking, uneducated labourers who provided the brawn necessary to build Canada's urban infrastructures, and by idyllic images of Italian peasants bringing their agricultural skills to urban Canadian cities and planting backyards full of tomatoes, grape vines, and beans. It was precisely the gap between the romantic image of Italy and the unappealing reality of the Italian immigrants in big cities like Toronto and Montreal that helped produce an invisible barrier, and that elicited a corresponding lack of interest on the part of some Canadians in the Italian Canadian communities.

As for the communities themselves, not only did they feel the need to show a more accurate and comprehensive picture of Italians in Canada, but they were also leading a life that had virtually no echo or representation outside itself. Their concern for showing a broader image of who they were was duly complemented by their desire to have themselves represented beyond their own communities, to see themselves in a mirror that would reflect their full image: 'Imagine waking up every morning and looking into a mirror that no longer reflects you but someone else', Marco Micone told an interviewer in 1989 (Micone in Caccia 1985:179).

Tony Nardi (1951-) and *La Storia dell'Emigrante* (1979)

The man who wrote the first multicultural play in the history of Canadian theatre and who is principally responsible for the entry of Italian Canadian plays into mainstream theatre is Tony Nardi. Tony Nardi was born in 1951, in a little village in southern Italy; he and his family immigrated to Toronto when he was five, in 1956. An actor, a journalist, a prolific writer of practically everything from newspaper fillers to award-winning plays, Nardi, throughout his life, and whatever his occupation, has demonstrated a constant passion for theatre. A former student of Bruno Mesaglio[13] and an active theatre practitioner in the Italian Canadian associations in Toronto and Montreal, Nardi took advantage of the newly established system of payments to bring his work into mainstream theatres in Canada. Before then, his plays, like those of Micone, were staged within the church basements, cafés, and auditoriums of their respective Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal. The major forces that drove these forms of community-based theatre, as discussed in the last chapter, were patriotic sentiments fuelled by familiar Italian folk songs, ballads, and operatic arias, and the appetite to be reassured by the well-ordered universe depicted in these.

Tony Nardi's first appearance on stage came even before he began school and, when his formal education ended, his first choice of career was acting. He briefly turned to journalism to please his Italian parents, who were not very keen on his first choice. Yet he would always use his spare time to write and direct plays for the local Italian social clubs. His first play, which was co-directed, was written in Italiese and staged at the Italian Canadian Cultural Association in Toronto in 1973. The play anticipated the later interest in self-referential history as it was about the daily life of an Italian Canadian family in Toronto under the regime of an authoritative patriarch, which would later come to constitute one of the main themes of *La Storia dell'Emigrante*. Nardi

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[13] See *Act I*, pp. 100-8.

managed to reach the mainstream theatre scene in Toronto only after his breakthrough as an actor in Montreal.

While his fame as an actor surpassed his reputation as a dramatist, Nardi continued to write and hoped that, one day, the success of his acting would attract more attention to his plays. His wish came true in 1979 with *La Storia dell'Emigrante*. Written in English and Italian, the play is no longer available in print. However, thanks to the *Centre des auteurs dramatiques* (CEAD) I have had the opportunity to listen to a recording of the play (*R*) in Montreal. The extracts provided from the play are transcriptions of my own notes and the references to scenes take into account the fact that *La Storia dell'Emigrante* is a 10-scene play.

Set in Woodbridge (Toronto), in the late 1960s, the action of *La Storia dell'Emigrante* unfolds within the Testa family home. The play begins with Raffaele Testa's announcement to his wife Filomena that, in the construction factory where he works, the Italians and the other workers, the Anglo-Canadians, have all gone on strike for better wages. Raffaele, a modest construction worker outside the home and a commanding patriarch within, supports the strike. Yet his solidarity with his Anglo-Canadian co-workers ends there, as he is strongly opposed to any kind of social interaction between Italians and Canadians outside the workplace. His eldest son, Sal, on the other hand, is not only on friendly terms with Michael, an Anglo-Canadian and fervent socialist, but is also (unknown to Raffaele) in love with Polly, a local Anglo-Canadian girl. Despite Raffaele's distrust of the Anglo-Canadians, he is persuaded by Sal and Michael's argument that their employers will try to sow division between the striking workers by playing 'the foreign card' and insinuating that the strike will come to an end as soon as the Italians are threatened with losing their jobs. Knowing that, as a respected and loyal member of Little Italy in Toronto, Raffaele will have more influence

with his co-workers than they will, Sal and Michael manage to convince him to urge the Italian workers to keep solidarity with their Canadian comrades and to resist their employers' attempts to divide them by fuelling ethnic stereotypes. Initially, the strategy works well. Enjoying the sense of power he experiences as a guarantor of working-class solidarity and relishing the fact that the Italian workers listen to him, Raffaele gives himself over to his new task with enthusiasm. The crisis of the play is precipitated, however, when he accidentally overhears that Sal and Polly are engaged and that, at Filomena's prompting, they had been planning to keep the engagement secret until the success of the strike was assured, for fear this might cause Raffaele to change his mind about advocating solidarity between the Italians and the Canadians. Horrified at the prospect of his eldest son's marrying an Anglo-Canadian and convinced that he is being used to undermine the wider interests of his own community, Raffaele declares that he will boycott the strike unless Sal and Polly agree to break off their engagement. When Sal and Polly refuse, the scene explodes into a brawl between father and son; Raffaele becomes increasingly hysterical and wrecks his tomato patch. Only Filomena's calls for reason and moderation manage to calm him down, along with the discovery that he will soon become a 'nonno' – a grandfather. Raffaele, dazed and 'as if in a dream' (*R*, scene 10), still maintains that his outburst was justified, while echoes from off-stage declare the success of the strike.

La Storia was an overwhelming success when it was first staged at the George Vanier Auditorium in Montreal, an important platform for Italian Canadian community-based theatre before the implementation of multicultural policies. 'Weeks of pre-sold performances, people clamouring for over-booked seats, and scalpers selling tickets for fifty and hundred dollars apiece' (Mazza 1980:C9) helped *La Storia* gain critical attention, in turn, from the media. The success of the play led to re-stagings in the

annual multicultural festivals in Montreal (1980), after the play had been translated into French, and in Toronto (1982).

What made Nardi's multicultural play so special? The significance of the play's subject matter and historical contingencies have to be taken into consideration. First and foremost, Nardi chose a controversial strategy to negotiate his field of action, foregrounding mutual prejudice as the main motive triggering the action of *La Storia*. In the play, prejudice splits Italians and Canadians and prevents them from communicating with one another; prejudice also operates in both directions, against the Italian / Italian Canadian group, as well as the Anglo-Canadian population. Concurrently, Nardi chose to frame *La Storia* in the context of an easily accessible historical event: the illegal strikes of construction workers that hit Toronto in the summer of 1960s and again in the summer of 1961.[14] Italian immigrant construction workers in Toronto's residential field engaged in a dramatic struggle for union recognition and for better pay and working conditions. Both campaigns involved mass rallies, charismatic leaders, and stiff employer opposition. Occurring within a sector of the industry that Italian immigrants had come to dominate, and set against a backdrop of recession and rising labour unrest, the strikes provided a graphic illustration of immigrant workers' militancy in post-war Canada. Importantly, the events surrounding the strikes exposed elements of mistrust within the Canadian organised labour movement towards the Italians, though they also

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[14] On 26 June 1961 more than 17,000 Italian immigrants, most of them men with twenty years' experience as construction workers, poured into Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition stadium to protest low wages, unsafe jobs, and employer abuses in the city's residential construction industry. It was the second illegal strike to hit the housing field within a year. The large crowd made an impressive show of strength as negotiators entered into talks in an attempt to end the month-old strike. In the spotlight were the two men who had called the rally – veteran organizer Charles Irvine, a Canadian union leader, and Bruno Zanini, an Italian Canadian bricklayer who had led the first union drives among the immigrants. To thunderous approval, Irvine called for the release of Italians arrested for alleged picket-line violence. Zanini's orders that no one break ranks until all the striking trades reached an agreement were met with enthusiasm. As the rally ended, squads of picketers packed into trucks and descended on worksites throughout the city and its suburbs. For a more detailed account, read Wilfred List's 'Strikes and settlements' (1961:B16), or Salvatore (1999:39).

helped pave the way for an early alliance between Italian immigrants and Canadian workers in the Toronto construction trades and explicit responses from Torontonians.

Although the subject matter of Nardi's play may seem explicitly political, it is the wider social and cultural contest between Italian immigrants and Anglo-Canadians that provides the play with its essential themes. Its political issues, which are usually associated with the public sphere, are mediated exclusively here through the private sphere: the Testa living room in which the play is set. The action elsewhere – Raffaele's addresses to the Italian community in Toronto, Sal and Michael's meetings, and various diatribes against the Italians' commitment to the strike – is merely reported. Since these public spaces are not actually staged, everything that happens in the play happens 'inside', in a manner typical of domestic tragedy (Godin 1999:142), which was the preferred form of theatrical representation for Italian Canadian playwrights of the 1980s.

Conversely, Nardi's choice of the illegal strikes of construction workers in Toronto as a backdrop does not imply the playwright's exclusive interest in exploring the dynamics of history, nor does it suggest his partisan approval of the strikers' actions. Rather, it has the dual function of interrogating Italian prejudiced attitudes towards social change and, at the same time, reframing the representation of Italians produced by the dominant culture. It is not by direct analysis of the causes of the strike that Nardi seeks to find any resolution to the situation; indeed, no one directly involved in the strike ever appears onstage. This backdrop seems to throw into relief the very different conflicts unfolding within the walls of the house, requiring that the 'hard' currency of the political subject matter be converted into the 'softer', more affective currency of a family narrative. In order to set off this mechanism, Nardi introduces a thesis, clearly stated in the first scene when Raffaele says: 'Nothing good comes from an

Italian/Canadian alliance' (*R*, scene I). With this plain statement of theme the audience might initially be likely to expect a thesis play, pure and simple, but the next speech affords at least a clue as to the direction the play will take, when Raffaele declares: 'Fine or no fine, my son should not hang out with them [the Anglo-Canadians]' (*R*, scene 7). It is reasonable to assume from this that the play will go on to be one of conflicting wills. And that is exactly what it is: Raffaele and Filomena, Sal and Polly must have something to struggle about, something that will develop and reveal to the audience their problematic relationships. Within the allegorical framework of an Oedipal family drama, such conflicts must be imagined primarily in terms of an overthrow or, perhaps better, a relaxation of paternal authority. The curious paradox which governs Nardi's plot, however, is that it is a given of the piece that social transformation requires not so much the overthrow as the full cooperation of the stubborn father; after all, the starting premise in the play is that without Raffaele's support the strike will inevitably fail and working-class solidarity will give way to the undermining of a common cause. Since his commitment to radical social change in the 'public' political sphere effectively entails, within the logic of the 'private' Oedipalised framework of the play, a corresponding commitment to the lessening of his own paternal authority, the narrative is structured so that Raffaele's symbolic position as authoritarian *paterfamilias* and his political commitment to the strike are at cross-purposes from the start:

> Immigrants... immigrants. What immigrants? These people [the Anglo-Canadians] need their houses built, who do they call? An Italian? You need a bricklayer, he's Italian ... You need to teach these people how to cook and eat, who are they going to call? An Italian! What are they... savages? (*R*, scene 3)

The bind in which Raffaele finds himself, I would suggest, can be read as an elegantly compressed dramatic metaphor for a wider political one, that is, whether first-generation Italian immigrants can commit themselves to social transformation, a transformation

from which both Italian immigrants in need of work and Anglo-Canadians might benefit. On this reading, Raffaele is the villain or moral culprit of the play: it is his inability to overcome his personal prejudice against the Anglo-Canadians that threatens to destroy the strike.

While the play can support such a reading, it is ultimately more complex; Raffaele's support for the strike is, after all, represented as principled and sincere. When he discovers Sal's engagement to Polly and decides, after some irresolution, that he can no longer maintain his support for the strike, it is not simply (or at least not only), as Crew puts it, that 'atavistic fanaticism reasserts itself' (Crew 1979:C9). Although this may well be how the other characters in the play see things, from Raffaele's own perspective the proposed union between Sal and Polly is objectionable not only because it violates the social apartheid between Italians and Canadians that he upholds, but also because it intimates a wider threat: assimilation. The crux which binds him, in other words, is that he is willing to support the working-class alliance of the Italians and the Anglo-Canadians, but only on condition that its purpose does not go beyond the improvement of their joint economic lot. But what the alliance between Sal and Polly brings home to him is that the development of common economic interests between Italian and Canadian workers cannot be divorced from wider social developments. Hence what starts out as cross-community economic solidarity may lead sooner or later to other forms of social unity as well, eventually undermining the commitment to Raffale's traditions and beliefs, which are obviously dear to him.

La Storia should be understood, then, not simply as a play that offers an ethical or moral critique of ethnic excess and prejudice, but as a more complex work in which Raffaele's dilemma ultimately takes on mutually contradictory aspects. This conception of Raffaele's situation reflects a social and historical truth of a more significant order

than any critique of parochialism could disclose. A moral critique would conceive of Raffaele's attitude essentially in terms of personal limitation: divisions persist, that is, because unenlightened individuals fail to overcome their atavistic and irrational prejudices. However, the construction of Raffaele's character as an inflexible one stemming from irreconcilable subjects and commitments can yield to a more sympathetic diagnosis by allowing that mutual suspicion and segregation persist not simply because of personal weakness or moral dogmatism, but also because Raffaele is exposed to the threat of identity loss. The construction of Raffaele's dilemma is one in which his willingness to work to improve the shared economic interests of Anglo-Canadian and Italian workers comes into irresolvable conflict with his desire to maintain what he believes to be the basis of a culturally Italian identity:

> They [the Italian immigrants] had come to Canada believing it was the land of opportunity, but it also seemed to be a land devoid of tradition and morals. They found Canadian customs strange, especially the holiday celebrated with turkey instead of saints! Mannaggia all'America [*to hell with America* or *Damn America*; translation mine]![15] (*R*, scene 3)

When Canada fails to live up to his expectations, Raffaele curses the fate that has forced him to forsake his beloved homeland and seek his fortune in an alien country. Hence, in the face of this alienation and isolation, he feels he has to cling to his traditional way of life since the 'Canadian way' is not acceptable. However, the final scene of the play shows Raffaele wrecking his tomato patch. This can clearly work as a symbol of the state achieved by his personal identity, a 'subject-in-progress' that now seems ready to be refashioned from its own ruins; but it can also be interpreted as Raffaele's desperate final act: eradicating the infestation of younger generations.

The ambivalent function of the romance between Sal and Polly in *La Storia* also requires attention. Their romance seems to speak as an allegory for a kind of national

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[15] *Mannaggia* literally means 'male ne abbia' – 'let ill-fortune fall upon you'. The Italians are actually giving the evil eye to America.

romance: in the lovers' erotic embrace, traditionally antagonistic communities come to recognise each other as allies. Yet within the actual structure of the plot, that same romance also serves paradoxically as the critical obstacle to working-class unity: when Sal and Polly refuse to give each other up, Raffaele feels he has no option but to ruin the strike. In the pivotal final scene, Raffaele pleads with Sal and Polly to break off their engagement in order to maintain the separation between the Canadians and the Italians while, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, Michael, the socialist union leader, also pleads with them to give each other up lest their union jeopardise Raffaele's support for the strike and the promise of an eventual national unity that may depend on its success. Strangely, then, the romance seems to demand interpretation on one level as an allegory of socio-political unity and on another as its immediate practical impediment. This disjunctive status is captured in an exchange between Michael and Filomena. When Michael pleads that collective good be put before private interest, even though the goals of labour collective do not appear to coincide with those of the Italian Canadian community, Filomena protests: 'Can't you see, they're doin' the very thing you want your strikers to do. It's Canadians and Italians joinin' hands together' (*R*, scene 7). Michael responds: 'We need bigger joining of hands, Filomena' (*R*, scene 7). While Filomena reads the proposed union between Sal and Polly as an omen of a wider social union between Canadians and Italians, Michael reads it, in the immediate context at least, as an impediment or threat to that same ultimately desired end. Michael is, however, an Anglo-Canadian and he seems to have no notion of the family dynamics of an Italian Canadian household as the Testas are the first Italian Canadians he has ever met (*R*, scene 5).

How are we to interpret this curious romance, which seems to function simultaneously as the symbol of a desired union between Canadians and Italians and as the very thing that destroys Italian support for the solidarity between these communities,

as expressed in the strike? Perhaps the best way to do so is to see the ambivalent status of the romance as a symptom of a genuine Italian Canadian dilemma in Canada during the 1980s. In other words, while the romance of an Italian Canadian union is attractive as an ideal, the difficulty from the Italian immigrants' perspective is how to ensure that one of the practical consequences of such a union does not become an assimilationist erosion of a distinct Italian identity over the longer term. Yet, with the terror of assimilation and loss of identity in mind, *La Storia* suggests that prejudice is not the way forward. In this respect, the play demonstrates the importance of family and community in challenging social marginalisation and in establishing a way out of mutual suspicion. This reading is enhanced by Raffaele's relaxation after Filomena's calling him 'nonno' – a clear (however implicit) reference to the grandchild whom the union of Sal and Polly has produced. Yet, much in line with the Italian Canadian productions of the period, the future is uncertain. In fact, the play seems to indicate that the newborn might only constitute an ephemeral bond connecting the Italians and the Canadians. Raffaele's final remark, that he was right all along, can refer either to the success of the strike or to his belief that nothing good will result from the union of the Italians and the Canadians. The audience is then left to wonder whether Italians and Canadians will ever cease to be opposed.

Marco Micone (1947-)

La Storia dell'Emigrante undoubtedly widened the range of theatre productions in Toronto, paving the way for mainstream Italian Canadian theatre (Mazza 1980:C9). Conversely, according to the reviewers of the period (Crew 1979:C9; Kaplan 1980:43), the play also appeared to establish Toronto as the centre of Italian Canadian theatre activity in the 1980s. However, while *La Storia* was being revived in 1982, another playwright from Montreal was to challenge this belief by linking the Italian Canadian theatre of the 1980s with a competing social, cultural, and physical milieu. The

playwright in question was Marco Micone. Born in a little village of southern Italy, Micone arrived in Montreal in 1958 at the age of eleven and has been living in the heart of Montreal's ethnic neighbourhoods ever since. His education included an M.A. (1969) from McGill University with a thesis on the theatre of Marcel Dubé. His interest in theatre, along with an informal cooperation with the Workshop Theatre of Montreal, provided Micone with a general idea of how a play should be workshopped, directed, and developed. Yet, although his inclination towards theatre was apparent, he needed to find material for his plays, content that spoke to him personally (Micone in Caccia 1998:187). As a history teacher at Montreal's Vanier College, he created the first recognised course on the experiences of Italian immigration to Montreal and later started to experiment with adapting the subjects of his teaching to playwriting. His first play, *Gens du silence*, was staged within the premises of Vanier College in 1980 by Le Théâtre de l'Ouverture. Numerous public readings of the play followed, which led to the publication of *Gens du silence* in 1982, the year that officially launched Micone's literary career. Like Nardi before him, Micone benefited from the support of the Italian Canadian cultural community in Montreal which, through governmental funding, had been putting together commercial projects to promote the long-established Italian Canadian culture of the city since the late 1970s. In conjunction with this, readings and performances of Micone's work were also encouraged and recognised by the CEAD, *Centre des auteurs dramatiques*, which was, and still is, representative of all professional Francophone theatre in Quebec and throughout Canada. In the early Eighties the CEAD started to broaden its remit to accommodate general changes in the cultural context that were being fostered by the Ministry for Multiculturalism. Thanks to the support of the Italian Canadian cultural community in Montreal and the CEAD, Micone wrote another two plays from 1982 to 1988, *Addolorata* (1983) and *Déjà l'agonie* (1986/1988) which, along with *Gens du silence*, constitute a triptych of

plays depicting the Italian immigrant condition in Montreal. Not only were these plays successfully produced for Montreal audiences, but acclaimed Le Théâtre de la Manufacture[16] productions of *Addolorata* and *Déjà l'agonie* also established Micone's trilogy as a seminal phase in Québécois dramaturgy. This phase was marked by each of these plays being short-listed for important institutional recognition, in the shape of the Governor General's Award. Secondly, *Addolorata* won the 1989 *Journal de Montréal*'s Grand Prix, an acknowledgment which came from the largest-circulation French-language newspaper in North America, famous for its Quebec-nationalist perspective. Thirdly, almost immediately after having been published in French, the three plays were all translated into English through CEAD projects aimed at reaching the wider North American theatre public.[17] By successfully breaking the barriers of mainstream theatre in Quebec, Micone's plays eventually altered its theatre scene, demonstrating in the process that mainstream theatre and audiences in the provinces were extremely receptive to the kaleidoscope of themes that the dramatisation of immigrant conditions in Montreal offered (Micone in Minni and Ciampolini 1990:153; Moss 1996:80; Vaïs and Wickham 1994:30).

Between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, after *Gens du silence*, *Addolorata* and *Déjà l'agonie*, Micone published a poem, 'Speak What' (1989); *Le Figuier enchanté* (1992), a collection of autobiographical *récits*; French translations of Italian plays; and a series of critical essays on the place of immigrants within the Quebec

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[16] Le Théâtre de la Manufacture and Le Théâtre de l'Ouverture were instrumental in the appreciation and representation of Micone's plays. As made clear in their mission statement, their role has always been to favour 'la découverte et l'épanouissement d'une dramaturgie actuelle qui questionne notre société et les enjeux, intimes ou collectifs, de sa constante mutation' [the discovery and the blossoming of a contemporary dramaturgy that questions our society and the intimate or collective challenges of its constant mutation] (Retrieved from: http://www.theatrelalicorne.com/2009/notrehistoire.php; last accessed on August 2013).

[17] In 1984 *Gens du silence* reached the United States thanks to the Festival of New Quebec Plays which Ubu Rep and the CEAD organized at Ubu as part of the CEAD's larger *Montréal Théâtre Québec* initiative in New York. For a more comprehensive discussion of the circulation, popularity, and touring of Micone's plays in North America, see Benson and Conolly (1990:565,580).

collective.[18] With 'Speak What', Micone seemed to have distanced himself from a self-reflexive history which advanced a specific and distinctive place for the Italian immigrants and their culture in Quebec, and to have embraced instead an assimilationist perspective for some (D'Alfonso 1996:175-6; Pivato 1999:48), a transcultural position[19] for others (Caccia 1982:264; Loriggio 2004:36). One group of critics believes that Micone's more recent work favours the idea that Italian Canadians residing in Quebec must now integrate with the Francophone community in Quebec:

> The [latest] Micone works suggest that the cultural baggage that an immigrant carries from his native land must gradually be thrown away. Of course he gives immigrants a leeway to this dispersing of his/her culture, but assimilation should never take too long before it occurs. (D'Alfonso 1996:176)

A second group of scholars, however, contends that Micone's latest work is no longer concerned with such identity determinants as *Italian* and *Canadian*. According to these scholars, and I share their views,[20] Micone's works are now exploring ideas that transcend communities, national boundaries and nationalities in order to deal with universal themes that pertain primarily to individuals. Given the complexity of the author and his oeuvre, I have decided in this chapter to limit the scope of my analysis to his trilogy. This has the advantage of reinforcing my general thesis that Italian Canadian theatre had to travel via idiosyncratic hyphenated Canadian identities before tackling themes that might allow for the emergence of more fluid hybrid identities, as my closing chapter, *Act III*, will emphasise.

The Micone triptych is also emblematic, however, of the circumstances under which he found himself before entering Montreal's mainstream theatres. In the Quebec in which he started to write his plays, being Italian Canadian was compounded by a

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[18] For more on Micone's work after his *Trilogie du silence*, see D'Alfonso (1996); Micone (2004; 2012); Simon (2006).

[19] See *Act III*, pp 210-1.

[20] My analysis of *Déjà l'agonie* will confirm this; see sub-section on *Déjà l'agonie* (1986/1988); see *Act III*, p. 211.

sociological binary. As an immigrant in Quebec, he was also suspended not only between Italian and Québécois identities, but also between two different ways of being Québécois drawn along ethnocultural lines, French and English, with each line revealing 'l'appartenance à une culture, à une société, déterminant une place dans la hiérarchie économique et sociale' [allegiances to a culture, a society, which determine a place in the economic and social hierarchy] (Micone in De Luca 2006:13). In other words, the three plays all hinge on negotiations between competing ways of belonging. At the same time, unlike the post-1989 works, in their cultural and literary references and borrowings the three plays are neither completely new nor radically other to the post-Quiet Revolution,[21] Québécois theatre tradition and its linguistic heritage (Micone in De Luca 2006:18; Simon 1984:458). In referencing the major themes, forms, and ambitions of the cultural nationalist *nouveau théâtre québécois* of the 1960s and 1970s, 'the trilogy both inserted itself into that movement and was framed by an allied yet distinct constituency' (New 1989:218). In this respect, the writing style of *Gens du silence* and of *Addolorata* is broadly realistic and punctured by Brechtian distancing effects, with narrator figures and an emphasis on the didactic presentation of socio-political issues (Worthen 2004:710-12; 919-28). As for the themes, although all three plays revolve around domestic scenes and remain fundamentally dramas of interpretation in which the dramatic tension arises from the clash of world views and the

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[21] Since the 1970s, the historical consensus – as expressed in the influential synthesis authored by Paul-André Linteau, Rene Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert and François Ricard (1991) – is that the Quiet Revolution, in its most precise sense, described a series of political, economic, and social reforms undertaken by the Liberal government of the Premier of Quebec, Jean Lesage, between 1960 and 1966. In a larger sense, these historians apply the term to the period extending from 1960 to 1980, an era which, in their view, was characterised by stronger neo-liberal and neo-nationalist politics (Lester and Philpot 2005; Nardocchio 1986:77-8). Thus, the Quiet Revolution has been associated with politics, either through a far-reaching campaign of accelerated state intervention during the 1960s in the areas of education, economic management, health and social services, or through the attempts of successive Quebec governments to assert greater constitutional authority vis-à-vis federal government, or through projects to promote a vision of Quebec as a sovereign nation. Ultimately, Québécois witnessed a secularisation of those institutions (e.g. the education system) in which Catholicism and Protestantism used to prosper (Dickinson and Young 2003:327-8). Also, see *Act I*, 'note 21', and *Act III*, 'note 12'.

words and action used to convey them, the action centres on a range of brand-new protagonists for the Quebec theatre tradition: families comprising different generations of Italian immigrants and characters of Italian heritage. Through a series of debates between the central characters, the Micone trilogy would introduce its urban audiences to the general features of the Italian immigrant condition in 1980s Montreal as these manifested themselves in the particular context of family drama.

So far, I have outlined what brought Marco Micone to playwriting, how he started his literary career and what this meant for the incursion of Italian Canadian theatre into the Montreal theatre scene. I would now like to turn to the triptych of plays and to their interpretation. I will provide each play with a brief plot summary, keeping to the order in which the dramatic works were published, and each summary will then be followed by a discussion of the play in question, which will focus on the conflicts triggered by the specific story it enacts.

Gens du silence (1982)

Gens du silence (1982) is an ambitious fresco which attempts to embrace through the experience of one family the psychological, social, and political realities of immigration. The play is set in 1970s Montreal and revolves around the story of Antonio and his conflicts with his wife, Anna, his son, Mario, and his daughter, Nancy. The family drama explodes when Mario, Nancy and Anna decide to open their mouths and speak out against Antonio's oppression. In so doing, the characters react resolutely against the lifestyle that Antonio has imposed upon them by means of a tyrannical authoritarianism, by economic sacrifices, by imposing English as the language of instruction for his children, and by hiding the poor conditions of the family from the world outside. *Gens du silence* is organised around scenes consisting of quick presentations of situations, alternating scenes of family drama, and

various, often complicating, comments of the characters on racial prejudice against the Italian Canadian community in Montreal. Through the characters' emigration from their native village in Italy, their lonely arrival in Canada, and their difficult readjustment to life in the new world, Micone gives the spectator a clear picture and differing opinions of the phenomenon of Italian immigration to Montreal. Brechtian echoes also occupy an important part in the play with the introduction of symbolic characters – the Church, the Boss, the Immigrant – that aim to denounce Antonio's steadfast reverence for authority, his exploitation as a labourer, and his experiences as an Italian immigrant to Montreal.

In *Gens du silence*, Micone looks at popular districts of Montreal where families of Italian immigrants are 'enfermés entre trois carrières de ciment et le Boulevard Métropolitain' [locked within the three cement works and the Boulevard Métropolitain; translation mine] (*GDS*, p. 40). Viewed with suspicion as a threat, the community remains a poor and closed entity, lost in its own world and often criticised by other poor people who consider it to be an enemy:

> UN HOMME :
> Ils bossent toujours, on ne les voit jamais [...]. Ça travaille pour rien, ce monde-là.
> Et en plus ça apporte des cadeaux au boss […] Il n'y a pas plus lèche-cul qu'eux
> autres ! Au salaire qu'ils font, j'aimerais mieux être sur le Bien-être !
> (*GDS*, II, p. 12)
> [A MAN:
> They slog their guts out, we never see them [...] They work for nothing. To top it
> all, they bring gifts to the boss [...] No one kisses an ass better than them.
> Considering the salary they make, I'd rather be on welfare; translation mine]

This hostility is largely due to the hard working lives to which the Italian immigrants are subjected. Since they are too busy working, their neighbours hardly see them and this makes them effectively 'invisible' (*GDS*, pp. 12-4; p. 40). Still worse, the Italian characters seem to have no time to talk to their neighbours (*GDS*, p. 16). Yet on another

level, this silence, which is embedded within the title of the play, seems rather contradictory. As Pivato puts it:

> All of the characters in Micone's play talk a lot. They talk too much in fact, and their very volubility becomes increasingly suspect as the play progresses. Too many words can begin to sound like silence when we realise that words are used, not only to convey information or express emotion but also to indicate self-importance – or to mask the fear of insubstantiality. (1985:61)

Words are also interpretations of reality: the 'talking matches' in the play are 'heated discussions, conflicting versions of reality that confront one another in mutual incomprehension.' (Pivato 1985:61) Three voices play a crucial role in these discussions – that of the dominant and tyrant male (Antonio), who represents the traditional, conservative view; that of the subordinate but lucid females (Anna, Nancy), perhaps en route to emancipation; and that of the symbolic characters, the Boss or the Immigrant, with whom the other characters are in conflict. The male-female voices confront one another in dialectical form (*GDS* pp. 29-36); while the symbolic characters introduce a third voice, a synthesis that gives the play broader socio-political resonance (*GDS* pp. 26-7; pp. 37-8; pp. 61-2). We see language operating here as an instrument of power within the family (who speaks and what influence his/her words have), and also as an indicator of social status. For Antonio, English is the language of the bosses, the language that inspires respect (*GDS*, p. 24; p. 26; p.35). Antonio insists that his children go to an English-medium school:

> Eh, oui ! Ils [the Anglo-Canadians] n'ont pas seulement les bonnes cartes. Eux. Ils savent aussi jouer. C'est pour ça qu'ils gagnent… C'est important de comprendre ça. Pas pour nous […] pour nous, il est trop tard
>
> (*GDS*, V, p. 23)

> [Yep, the English not only have all the right cards, they know how to play them too. That's why they win. It's important to understand that. Not for us, […] it's too late for us; translation mine]

Antonio's son, Mario, who was born in Quebec and who did indeed go to an English-medium school, speaks half-French and half-English and copiously punctuates the

resulting mixture with swearwords (*GDS*, pp. 39-43). Antonio is proud that Mario can speak three languages, but Mario's unsure grip on language reflects his inability to obtain social advancement (he will eventually go to work in the same factory as his father). Nancy sees only advantages in multilingualism. Her three languages are a precious asset for 'marriageability' and the good life (*GDS*, p. 32). Language and culture are also the means through which individuals interpret their past and their present. The incapacity to master language becomes, in *Gens du silence*, tantamount to the inability to understand one's own reality. As Nancy puts it:

> J'enseigne […] à des adolescents qui portent tous un nom italien et dont la seule culture est celle du silence. Silence sur les origines paysannes de leurs parents. Silences sur les causes de leur émigration. Silence sur la manipulation dont ils sont les victimes. Silences sur les raisons de ce silence.
>
> (*GDS*, XII, p. 50)

> [I teach [...] adolescents who have Italian names and whose only culture is that of silence. Silence on the peasant origins of their parents. Silence on the reasons which led their parents to emigrate. Silence on the manipulations of which they are victims. Silence on the country in which they live and on the reasons for this silence; translation mine]

Nancy denounces the constricted circumstances in which she finds herself. There seems to be no room for speaking up in the community to which she belongs, oppressed as it is by the 'culture of silence' that prevents its people from becoming aware of the situation in which they are involved and from initiating a process of renewal.

The counterparts to these silences are the assertions of Antonio, the aggressive convictions he uses to protect himself from insubstantiality. Antonio is for authority, against the separatists, for his wife staying at home, for the English, for the Church and its processions. He believes that French Canadians are lazy, and that hard work must be accompanied by respect for those who command (*GDS*, pp. 23-5). Antonio's knowledge has been gathered through suffering and work. When his ideas are challenged, he maintains that his view of reality is the only valid one because it is supported on this

foundation. Nancy articulates the relationship between authorised opinion and status when she says sarcastically: 'Tu es le seul à pouvoir tout comprendre parce que toi, tu n'es ni jeune, ni femme' [You are the only one that can understand because you're neither young nor a woman] (*GDS*, p. 56; translation mine). Antonio has dedicated his life to the building of this edifice of conviction, just as he has sacrificed himself for the acquisition of a house. This house, detested by Mario as a useless museum and by Nancy as a symbol of all the privations the children have suffered, is for Antonio tangible compensation for the loss he has suffered as an immigrant: 'Ici, je n'ai plus mes ancêtres pour me protéger. Ici, je n'ai plus de collines pour respirer.' [Here I have no ancestors to protect me. Here I have no hills where I can breathe] (*GDS* pp 61-2; translation mine). Antonio's position is weak and the Anglo-Canadian culture he reveres does not help him find either a political or a cultural way out of this weakness. Basically, he lives in a world dominated by fear of the world outside and defends his circumscribed idea of *home* as the place that keeps his dreams and expectations alive and coherent: '[...] pour les gens comme moi, la maison est plus qu'une maison... beaucoup plus qu'une maison [...].' [For an immigrant like me, the house is more than a house [...] much more than a house […].] (*GDS*, p. 61; translation mine)

The perspectives of Antonio's children disavow his paternal visions by initiating a cultural project which, as in *La Storia dell'Emigrante*, will eventually see paternal desires succumb and the rebellion against a passive acceptance of authority rise up. In this respect, Nancy emerges as Antonio's antagonist by exposing her willingness to think of Canada as a real possibility in life, not as an elusive utopia (*GDS*, pp. 50-1, 64). The last scene shows the culmination of Antonio's existential crisis as Nancy's departure produces an irreparable rift. Her leaving Antonio's house suggests that the culture of silence has definitively been replaced by the culture of action. By her gesture, Nancy seems to embody the ideal Italian immigrant who should not be afraid of

expressing his/her own opinion, and who should fight back without capitulating, no matter how challenging his/her belief might be. The final scene supports this view when the marginalised character of the Immigrant, an old man who sells balloons, remembers the time when Anna was crying at Antonio's departure. He tried to console her: 'Pleure pas, Anna. C'est pas en prison qu'il va ton Antonio. C'est en Amérique.' [Don't cry Anna. Your Antonio is not going to jail. He's going to America] (GDS, p. 64; translation mine). This final measure communicates both the illusions and the disillusionment of the Italian immigrant figure. But there remains the prospect of a departure, Nancy's, towards struggles that might allow her to fight more effectively for her freedom.

Addolorata (1983)

Micone's second play, *Addolorata* (1983), seems to begin where *Gens du silence* leaves off. The play narrates the vicissitudes of Addolorata who, after having spent her whole childhood at the mercy of a tyrant father, starts to believe that the only way to regain her freedom is through marriage. She duly marries Giovanni. However, her dreams are soon shattered again by the realities of marriage, with Addolorata's relationship with Giovanni merely replicating the one the female protagonist had previously had with her father. The harsh reality of an unhappy union is accentuated by the economic and social deprivation suffered by the couple. The play ends with Addolorata abandoning Giovanni. Addolorata focuses particularly on younger Italian immigrants and especially on the relationship between husband and wife. Like *Gens du silence*, *Addolorata* also makes extensive use of Brechtian devices, especially when Giovanni directly addresses the audience to express his personal, politically charged views on immigration and capitalism. Yet the authorities, which were referred to explicitly in *Gens du Silence*, are more indirectly incorporated here into the discourses of

the two protagonists in *Addolorata*, and are represented mainly through their impact on the power which exercises itself in family relationships.

In *Addolorata*, Micone takes up two themes as central conflicts and driving forces of the dramatic action. The first conflict concerns the problematic relationship between husband and wife, which is shown at two different stages of the lives of Addolorata and Giovanni, who are emblematic for two Italian Canadians struggling to renegotiate community-directed family roles. The second conflict pertains to the political sphere, and concerns Giovanni's and Addolorata's preoccupations with the working conditions of Italian immigrants in Canada. However, the impact of the political subject in *Addolorata* is mainly felt in the private sphere as an effect of the marginalised position of the Italian immigrants. Micone extends this to what he regards as the doubly marginalised status of Italian female immigrants, like Addolorata.

Addolorata and her husband are presented in two different time periods: the first just before their wedding; and the second, ten years later, just as Addolorata leaves Giovanni. Interestingly, the young couple and the more mature couple have different names: Johnny and Lolita at 19, Giovanni and Addolorata at 29. While Johnny and Giovanni appear in different scenes, in several of them Addolorata and Lolita share the stage, sketching a continuous history of unhappiness, violence, and oppression at the hands of first her father and then her husband (*A.*, pp. 17-22; 37-40). Through this name change, Micone seems to suggest that both the female and the male protagonists have given up their Canadian selves only to replicate, via their Italian names, the unhappy life of their parents. Although this may be true for Giovanni, Addolorata, the real heroine of the play, has never abandoned her younger self, for whom she has found the perfect partner (they share the stage without fighting unlike Giovanni and Addolorata). Also, Addolorata has kept Lolita's dreams of freedom undiluted throughout her adult life: 'je

ne veux plus vivre en pensant que, dans dix ans, dans vingt ans, ce sera comme aujourd'hui […] j'ai besoin de croire que je peux changer des choses dans ma vie' [I don't want to live anymore thinking that, in ten years, twenty years, my life will sill be the same as today […] I need to believe that I can change something in my life] (*A.*, p. 23; translation mine). Then she carries on and says: 'si je reste, on finira par faire une famille pire que celles qu'on a quittées.' [If I stay, we'll end up building a family worse than the families we had left behind] (*A.*, p 42; translation mine). Here Addolorata is criticising her husband for making her feel like a domestic prisoner, replicating Lolita's feelings as a youngster when watching his father exercising similar authority over her mother (*A.*, pp. 15, 72, 82). On the other hand, Giovanni appears to have reverted to the authoritative state that Giovanni as 19-year-old Johnny condemned (*A.*, pp. 26, 72, 90). Giovanni is a frustrated person who cannot shake off the condition of being an old-fashioned Italian immigrant, but who cannot manage to create new and favourable conditions of life for the woman he loves. At the end of the play, the departure of Addolorata is irrevocable. She claims that other Italian Canadian women like her are also the victims of an unfortunate marriage, but they cannot make the same decisions Addolorata made for they do not trust, or know, any other way of life. Hence they prefer to adhere to what they know and to adjust to what is being offered to them:

GIOVANNI :
Tu pars vraiment, là ? Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait de si grave ? Y a des dizaines de femmes dans le quartier qui vivent pas mieux que toi. Y en a pas une seule qui quitte son mari.

ADDOLORATA :
Elles ont peur. Elles ont pas d'autre modèle. Elles ont plus rien de vivant en elles depuis leur dernière grossesse. Pourquoi elles s'en iraient ? C'est à la maison qu'elles sont le plus loin de leurs maris. C'est là qu'elles se vengent le mieux, avec leurs visages crispés, leurs corps enlaidis et leur rage. C'est pour ça qu'elles restent.

[GIOVANNI:
You are really leaving, are you? What is it that I have done so wrong? There are dozens of women in the area that don't live a better life than you do. There isn't one that is leaving her husband.

ADDOLORATA:
They are afraid. They haven't known other role models. They have nothing left inside them after their last pregnancy. Why should they leave? Home is where they are the farthest away from their husbands. Home is where they take the sweetest revenge, their wrinkles, their body growing ugly and their rage. That's why they are staying.]

<div align="right">(A., XV, 92-3; translation mine)</div>

Although these Italian Canadian women seem to take vengeance on their husbands, the double-bind of vengeance and 'visages crispés, [...] corps enlaidis' [their wrinkles, their bodies growing ugly] is not what Addolorata is looking for: rather, like Lolita, what she wants most is independence.

In *Addolorata* Giovanni, like Antonio in *Gens du silence*, attempts to impose his vision of reality on his wife. Yet Giovanni differs from Antonio in his more complex and radical view of immigration. This difference is economically justified in the play by the fact that Giovanni refuses to work for a boss, choosing instead to run a pool room. His clients are 'des gens instruits' [educated people] (*A.*, p. 46), 'de not' bord' [people like us] (*A.*, p. 46). Giovanni's critiques of capitalist economics are also radical, antithetically positioned to Antonio's more conservative ones:

Si l'émigration était une bonne chose, on l'aurait pas laissée aux pauvres comme nous autres et nos parents. […] Dans un pays où les riches et le patrons mènent le gouvernement par le bout du nez, tous les pauvres, tous les ouvriers sont des immigrants.

[If emigration were a good thing, the poor people like us and our family wouldn't have been left with emigration. [...] In a country where the rich and the bosses are thick as thieves with the government, the indigents, the labourers are all immigrants]

<div align="right">(A., pp. 47, 57; translation mine)</div>

However, in *Addolorata* such standard historical and economic explanations, with their homogenised views of 'the immigrant condition', begin to sound like empty rhetoric. Giovanni does not hear Addolorata when she says that she does not want to have a boss

either and that she is leaving him (*A.*, p. 90). Giovanni is convinced that Addolorata understands nothing:

> [...] Toi, tu crois que c'est moi qui est le seul responsable de ton malheur. […] C'est pour ça que tu veux m'quitter comme t'as quitté ton père. Moi… moi, je crois qu'elle est pas ici la cause de notre misère. I faut tout changer. Tout. Tout.
>
> [[...] You think that the only cause of all your unhappiness is me [...] That's why you want to leave me just like you left your father. Me... I think that the cause of our misery is not to be found here. Everything must change. Everything.]

<div align="right">(A., p. 91; translation mine)</div>

But Addolorata refuses the political argument and returns to the personal: 'Moi, j'peux pas tout changer, Giovanni. Mais je vais changer ce que je peux' [I can't change everything, Giovanni. But I will change whatever I can.] (*A.*, p. 91; translation mine)

In Micone's plays, then, male rhetoric is an active agent in the oppression of women. In the dialectic of power/powerlessness which characterises the particular situation of the male immigrant (authoritative within the family, powerless outside the home), rhetoric – be it from the right or from the left – becomes an almost concrete manifestation of selfhood. Conflicting interpretations, as presented by Nancy and by Addolorata, are quite simply unacceptable within the context of the family and the couple. Their words do not carry the necessary weight. Yet Nancy and Addolorata, at the same time, are the only characters that seem to challenge the prevailing state of things. In fact Addolorata, like Nancy before her, cannot remain within her family to pursue her goal. Instead, she needs to leave the Italian immigrant community to which she belongs and find some place 'outside' where she might find words which will finally be heard. In the end, just as Nancy left her despotic father, so Addolorata leaves her marriage to pursue an independent life, leaving Giovanni to cry plaintively: 'J'peux pas rester tout seul. Che faccio solo? Tu peux pas partir. Tu peux pas. *Non posso vivere*

solo' [I cannot stay here all alone. What am I going to do all alone? You cannot leave. You can't. I can't live on my own] (*A.*, p. 94; translation mine).

Déjà l'agonie (1986/1988)

In *Gens du silence* and *Addolorata*, Micone looks at conflicts that each regularly end in departures or separations in the hope of negotiating an Italian Canadian identity that deviates from restrictive norms. Conversely, in *Déjà l'agonie* (1986), the playwright tries to resolve conflicts and to negotiate the difficult terrain between being Italian and Canadian by analysing what happens to his characters when, after departing, separating, and reuniting, they are caught in the process of negotiating their Italian Canadian identities. Originally staged in 1986 with the title *Bilico*, an Italian word meaning 'hanging on something, either a place, a situation or an ideal', *Déjà l'agonie* dramatises the cultural and psychological bifurcation that life in Quebec entails for Italian Canadian immigrants. A play in nineteen scenes set in Montreal in 1972 and in Collina, a small Italian village, fifteen years later, *Déjà l'agonie* includes a cast of characters encompassing Italian Canadians, a Canadian of Italian heritage, and a *Québécoise de souche* [Québécois born and bred]. Members from the first generation comprise the Spadas, Luigi and his parents, Franco and Maria; Nino, Luigi and Danielle's son, who was born in Canada and only appears in the village scenes; and the *Péquiste Québécoise de souche* Danielle, Luigi's wife and Nino's mother. The action revolves around Luigi's return to Collina, his native village. Accompanied by Nino, Luigi decides to travel to Collina to spend some time there reflecting on the state of his current life in Montreal. Luigi's homecoming is dictated by his wistful desire to revisit his Italian past, to resolve his troubled relationships with Franco and Danielle, and to achieve a more balanced equilibrium in his life as a whole. Yet his journey will

eventually go beyond recovering his stability: his return to Collina will also transform his and the other characters' existence.

Luigi's homecoming revolves around the struggle to harmonise his Italian past with his Montreal present. Luigi was born in Italy, which he left when he was a little boy, when he and his mother Maria emigrated to Quebec to join Franco, who had already left Italy to work in Montreal as a builder. Luigi belongs to the first-generation of Italian Canadians in Quebec with whom he shares the same sense of contrasting allegiances and tensions towards an Italian past and a future in Montreal (*DLA*, pp. 43-4). More particularly, we can see how this has affected Luigi's upbringing:

> Enfant, je croyais que le reste du monde ressemblait à mon village.
> Adolescent, immigré malgré moi, je désirais que Montréal lui ressemblât.
> Adulte, je suis habité par la ville et le village.
>
> [As a child, I used to think that the rest of the world looked like my village.
> As an adolescent, an immigrant against my own will, I was hoping that Montreal would look like my village.
> As an adult, I'm inhabited by the city and the village.]
>
> (*DLA*, p. 15; translation mine)

Luigi's constant repositioning and reconfiguring of his 'home' brings out a dynamic element motivating the uprootedness of the children of exiles. His roots are diasporic, not attached to one particular land; rather, they creep up along the various places Luigi has inhabited and that now 'inhabit him' in their turn. 'Village' and 'ville' become a synecdoche of his identity as an Italian Canadian in Quebec, a fragmented identity which is kept together by competing national adjectives. Caccia best describes such identities as 'hybrid':

> Une forme constituée de cultures subalternes et dominées, situées sur trois axes: l'expérience du vécu en pays d'origine, l'expérience d'émigration-immigration et, en dernier lieu, le devenir québécois avec toutes les difficultés d'adaptation que cela comporte.
>
> [A form consisting of subaltern and dominated cultures, on three axes: the life experiences in the country of origin, the emigration-immigration experiences and,

eventually, the future in Quebec with all the difficult implications of adapting this entails.]

<div align="right">(1982:263; translation mine)</div>

While Italy has always been a primal site of origin for Luigi, the direct source of his Italian linguistic and cultural background, his immigration as a child has transformed it into a repository of secondary, belated memory, to which he has added images and incidents of his Montreal years as an adolescent and as an adult. It is within these terms that Luigi's journey to Italy finds its explanation. All of these layers that had been passed down to him, and that had previously moulded his identity, define Luigi's journey as a process of searching – a creative vehicle of contact and transmission enabling an encounter between his past memories and Montreal.

However, if returning to Collina allows conflicting recollections to coalesce, this does not automatically transform Luigi's village into a privileged site of belonging. Moreover, Luigi's desire to visit Collina is neither a wistful longing for a lost or abandoned home nor a yearning to recall a time in the past that he believes to be better than the present. Rather, his return to his former home is dictated by three simultaneously connected reasons: his need to soften overwhelmingly negative memories of the hardship and deprivation he underwent in Italy and that forced the family to emigrate; his wish to recuperate his relationship with his father; and his desire to save his marriage.

Luigi's last memories of Italy are conditioned by images of a post-war, poverty-stricken Italian village (*DLA*, pp. 34, pp. 55-6, 77-8). He seeks a material connection with a 'before' – a time and a place in his childhood in which he and his parents have not yet suffered the effects of displacement and deprivation. Luigi's is a felt need to bring to the surface what the consequences of immigration have submerged (*DLA*, p. 37). Concurrently, Luigi's return to Collina is also meant to reconcile him with his domineering father. In fact, Franco's obsession with keeping Luigi within the Spada

familial circle, and with chaining him to the family business in Montreal (*DLA*, p. 28), have estranged Luigi from his father and from the limitations of his father's Italo-centric vision of the world. Franco's belief in the superiority of Italy over Quebec has also contributed to Luigi slowly distancing himself from his father and from his credo. Being an Italian immigrant in Montreal starts to become a limiting shell for Luigi that has to be re-opened by exposing the Italian immigrant community to Quebec and, through it, to the outside world (*DLA*, p. 28). Luigi decides to undertake the path towards political involvement, participating in the association for the rights of not just the Italian minority but all minorities in Quebec. In this sense, Luigi's political activism becomes directly proportional to his willingness to promote the integration of ethnic minorities in Quebec society. However, in doing this, Luigi is certainly not encouraging the immigrants, refugees, and exiles to conform to Quebec. What he is trying to promote is rather a dialogue between Quebec and the 'allophone' communities in order to discourage any vision of the world that might foment isolation from and suspicion of one another. Unwilling to accept the destiny that Luigi has chosen for himself, and unable to tolerate the opinions of his son, which he regards as rather shallow and rebellious (*DLA*, pp. 28, 42), Franco evicts Luigi from the family home. When Franco and Maria leave Montreal to return permanently to Collina, Luigi and Franco's relationship is permeated by resentful feelings which are destined to grow in intensity with the separation of father and son.

Luigi manifests his willingness to reconnect with Italy when he realises that his current life situation is unsatisfactory. The reasons behind this dissatisfaction are chiefly connected to his wife Danielle's involvement in the PQ. Their union reaches a dead end when Luigi realises that his wife seems in effect to be rejecting his Italianness:

> Un vrai Québécois? Dis-moi ce que je dois faire! Est-ce j'ai l'air plus vrai quand […] je mange des pâtes ou des cretons ? quand j'écoute Vigneault ou Verdi ? si je vote pour le PQ ou le NDP ? Il faut que tu me le dises, mon amour. Je suis prêt à

tout pour devenir un *vrai* Québécois. (*Il se fait plus ironique*) Se pourrait-il que ce soit un sujet tabou qu'il vaudrait mieux ne pas aborder parce que trop gênant ? Comme une question de gènes ? […] Et si on utilisait les noms pour identifier les faux Québécois ? […] Limitons-nous donc à nous deux, ma chérie. Comme toi tu es une vraie, et moi un faux […]

[A real Québécois? Tell me how to behave. [...] Eating pasta or cretons? Listening to Vigneault or to Verdi? Going to vote for the Parti Québécois or the New Democratic Party? You have to tell me, my love, what does it mean to be a real Québécois? *(He becomes more ironic)* Maybe this is a taboo topic which we'd rather not tackle because it is a disturbing topic, is it not? A matter of genes? What if one used names to spot the fake Québécois? Let's limit the discussion to ourselves then, my dear. Since you are the real one and I am the fake [...]]]

<div align="right">(DLA, pp. 29-30 ; translation mine)</div>

It gradually becomes clear that Luigi feels he is slowly distancing himself from his roots as a result of Danielle's pushing him towards *Québécitude*. Danielle's fervent political commitment to the PQ (*DLA*, pp. 28-9) starts to awake Luigi's coveting of his Italian heritage, which has long been dimmed, but it also turns Luigi's activity into a political struggle in which Quebec is seen as a political and economic nation overpowering its minorities.

Luigi's homecoming assumes key connotations to understanding the negotiation between being Italian and Canadian in *Déjà l'agonie*: Collina is a deserted village in ruins which functions as a metaphor of Luigi's life and relationships and their need to be refashioned. In this sense, Luigi's homecoming works not so much as an escape as a catalyst for the readjustment of his life. He needs a space to reflect on his life and on his achievements; at the same time, he needs a way to recover his roots. 'Italy' provides him with all these possibilities. Moreover, Luigi needs a travel companion whom he duly finds in his son Nino who enables him to bear witness to and participate in his transitory acts of memory (*DLA*, p. 37), to remember the village he had left behind (*DLA*, p. 45). The lines the two characters exchange transform the play into a tale where the storytelling of Luigi slowly brings back to life the village of his Italian childhood (*DLA*, pp. 21-4, pp. 42-4, p. 66). This access to memories from his childhood allows Luigi to enter the dimension of a forgotten past and to reconnect with his Italian roots.

The streets, buildings, and natural surroundings of Collina which had figured so strongly in his childhood are newly invested by images of a secure, stable, and comforting home (*DLA*, pp. 45-6).

The healing power of this tale also comes to the fore thanks to Nino's encouragements, which help Luigi's recollections model very different kinds of relationships from the ones he had been contemplating when he started reminiscing. In this sense, Luigi's anecdotes from childhood and adult life reveal a strong desire to reconnect with Danielle (*DLA*, pp. 70-2) and Franco (*DLA*, p. 44), letting the purgative element of his recollections gradually emerge through the magic of remembrance. Luigi starts seeing his relationship with Danielle as the basis for a new future when she joins him and Nino in Collina. By this gesture, she appears in turn to welcome Luigi's Italian heritage. Not only does she reach her family in Collina, but she also abandons the negative stereotypes which had previously conditioned her vision of Italy (*DLA*, p. 36) to embrace Luigi's Italianness as a repository of love and warm domesticity (*DLA*, pp. 72-3). In this way, Danielle negotiates her own path towards self-awareness. Her role as a political activist for the PQ in the 1970s had precluded any preoccupation other than the ones that were instrumental in the march towards Quebec's independence from Ottawa (*DLA*, p. 59). Hence, her own primal space coalesces into a collective quest for a mythical national identity that might define the Québécois as non-Canadian. There is no room for Luigi's solitude in the two solitudes of Canada (MacLennan 1945), namely the French and the English.[22] Implicit in this statement is a recognition that no importance is given to what other communities have to say about themselves and the rest of the country (*DLA*, p. 51). Luigi's Italianness is annihilated by Danielle's insistence on him impersonating the role of a Québécois husband, embracing the cause

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[22] Clashes like this must have been heightened by the confrontation between Francophones and Italian immigrants at the Saint-Léonard School in 1968, and by the remnants of the October Crisis; see *Introduction*, pp. 24-5.

of Quebec's independence (*DLA*, p. 29). Likewise, their son Nino is not allowed to go and visit his grandparents, who went back to Italy before Nino was born. As the son of a PQ activist, Nino has to represent the perfect Québécois, attending French schools and showing his allegiances to the nation of Quebec (*DLA*, p. 52).

The situation that Danielle presents before her revaluation of Luigi's Italian heritage has aligned itself with the ideals of Quebec's national character. What Micone explores here are the reasons for, the dynamics of, and the cost of Danielle adhering to nationalistic rhetoric. When her political career forces her to move to Quebec City (*DLA*, p. 60) the drifting apart of her relationship with Nino deepens, and she reaches a dead end in her marriage with Luigi. When the tragedy of her dying father brings her back to Montreal, her son and husband being on their trip to Italy, Danielle slowly starts to realise the emptiness of her life. Adamant about reconciling with her family, this is when she decides to join them in Italy (*DLA*, p. 69). And that is when the shifting in her attitude towards Luigi's heritage occurs:

> J'étais venue te dire combien j'aime me souvenir de l'après-midi que j'ai passé ici, il y a si longtemps. Il faut que Nino sache que nous nous sommes beaucoup aimés, toi et moi.
>
> [I've come here to tell you how much I enjoy reminiscing about the afternoon I had spent here so long ago. Nino should be told how much we have loved each other, you and me]
>
> (*DLA*, p. 72; translation mine)

Her acceptance of Luigi's Italianness also corresponds to her urge to make amends as a mother to Nino (*DLA*, pp. 62-3). The aridity of the solely political component in her life as a PQ activist agitating for the lost national (*Québécois*) character is replaced by her regretful feelings as a woman suffering from the necessity of recuperating her role as a mother.

Luigi's desire to reconnect with Franco and Maria is also catalysed by Luigi's homecoming. When in Collina, Luigi sees for the first time a more humanised father,

whose traumatic past makes him a figure with whom painful emotions can be shared. The complexity of Franco as a character is not fully revealed until the penultimate scene of the play:

> Personne ne m'adressait plus la parole. Je ne pouvais sortir sans me faire insulter. Même ma famille n'voulait plus me voir. Voilà pourquoi je suis parti. […] Pourtant, ils étaient tous très fiers de moi quand j'étais sur le clocher. Ils étaient tous contents que j'aie sauvé la cloche. On m'a même porté en triomphe après le départ des chemises noires […]. Ils savaient pas encore que les corbeaux avait souillé ma fiancée. […] C'était moi le coupable. Partout on répétait que je savais que Maria se faisait violer par les chemises noires et que j'avais préféré défendre la cloche.

> [Nobody would talk to me. I couldn't go out without being insulted. Even my family didn't want to see me anymore. That's why I had left. [...] Yet they were all proud of me when I was at the top of the bell tower. They were all happy because I had managed to save the church bell. I was even carried in triumph once the Black Shirts had left [...]. They didn't know yet that those criminals had soiled my fiancé. [...] I was blamed. Wherever I'd go, I'd be told that I knew that Maria was being raped by the Black Shirts, but I just wanted to protect the church bell.]
>
> (*DLA*, p. 77; translation mine)

This passage shows the moment in which Franco unburdens himself of the terrible negative memory he had formerly been hiding from his son. This, in Luigi's eyes, turns Franco into a hero who, haunted by an encumbering past, had been leading a life halfway between being an errant hero and a quixotic figure. Tormented by remorse and intent on extinguishing it, Franco undergoes the penance of leaving his wife and child to start his own chain of migrations (*DLA*, p. 28). However, he ultimately decides to return to the scene of his 'crime' with Maria (*DLA*, p. 78). Like Danielle's reunion with her family, Franco's homecoming is driven by redemptive desire.

Similarly, Maria, in spite of her tragedy, decides to return to Collina with Franco. As the iconic representation of the mother enduring suffering for the sake of her family, Maria does not seem to give so much importance to where she is so long her family is united. However, in having returned to Italy with Franco, Maria has been denied the enjoyment of watching her grandson grow up in Quebec. This, and Franco's newfound stability, eventually cause her to recover the balance in her life:

> Je n'serais plus capable de t'aimer [to Franco], loin de Luigi et de Nino
> Je serais partie s'ils étaient venus me chercher avant.
>
> [I would no longer be able to love you, away from Luigi and Nino
> I would have left earlier had they come here looking for me.]
>
> (*DLA*, pp. 64-5; translation mine)

To have her family back allows Maria to regain an effective means of orientation in their migration. In this perspective, Franco and Maria unwittingly become the missing link to overcome the tragedy in Luigi's existence. His parents become the antidote to Luigi's struggles to reconcile his Italianness with his *Québécitude*. Franco's and Maria's respective sufferings epitomise continuity, registering the possibility of restoring the freedom offered by both Montreal and Italy to express the whole range of human emotions, including sorrow and despair.

It is Nino, however, who is the character representing real continuity between the conflicting scenarios triggered by *Déjà l'agonie*. Nino symbolises continuity in the face of disruption and the conjunction of reconfiguring desires among the entrenched memories of the other characters in the play. He does not seem to enjoy his father's village of origin and does not even fully understand the emotional struggles behind Luigi's memories. Yet this apparent detachment conceals the key to overcoming the boundaries that characterise the negotiation of conflict in the play. Nino is the necessary distancing element that helps the lives of the other characters to move on, allowing them to abandon their separate quests for equilibrium and so to engage in a final collective homecoming. From having been at a crossroads, these characters all eventually take a turn to the future. Will this be in Montreal? The play ends before the audience can find out.

Caterina Edwards (1948-) and *Homeground* (1986)

Caterina Edwards arrived in Calgary from Venice in 1956, at the age of eight, with her British father and Italian mother. After attending the University of Alberta, she

developed an interest in creative writing, and she started to publish a series of short stories; one of them was published in 1973, in the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*.[23] At the same time, Edwards met an American student of Sicilian origins, whom she married; shortly after, the couple settled in Toronto, where they lived for 10 years; and in 1985, they moved back to Alberta to raise a family. From this point of view, Edwards has been able to explore the relationships between southern Italy, Europe and Canada, Italy and Alberta. It is a life full of contrasts and rich possibilities which are amply exploited in her literary work.

When, in the early Eighties in Toronto, the young Caterina Edwards began writing about the experiences of the Italian Canadian community she grew up in, there were no models for her other than her own life. She became the first recognised Italian Canadian dramatist writing about western Canada. In her 1990 essay, 'The Playwright's Experience', Edwards explains how she discovered that there was an Italian immigrant community 'out there', and that she had the opportunity to tell its stories:

> In 1983 I started to interview some family friends and the people of Italian heritage I had met in Edmonton. They seemed to lament that the Edmontonians, let alone the Canadians, had no notion at all of the background of sacrifice and toil the Italian Canadians endured in the 1950s to settle in the Prairie Provinces. (Edwards in Minni and Ciampolini 1990:107-11)

Edwards realised that these people wanted to see, and wanted Anglo-Canadians to see, the struggles that Italian Canadians had been through to consolidate their Italian Canadian identity in the prairies. They wanted to encourage debates in Canada about their Italian Canadian ways of belonging, and to share their preoccupations with identity as a consequence of their dislocation. In particular, Edwards was drawn to the ways these individuals needed to keep links with their old culture and the home country, to seek refuge from 'the harsh winters in the prairies, which ran the risk of making them

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[23] A comprehensive list of Edwards's prose work can be found on Pivato's online platform (1996) and on Edwards's own website (2013).

laughable creatures' (Pivato 1994:111). This is how Caterina Edwards came to write her first and only play at present, *Homeground* (1986), and how she selected its most important themes.

Homeground was staged in Toronto in 1985 through the multicultural programme, but it was only under the patronage of Brian Paisley,[24] who brought the play to the 1986 Edmonton Fringe Festival, that *Homeground* became a major hit, enjoying repeated productions back in Toronto (Pivato 1999:60). The festival was only four years old when Edwards's play was performed in Edmonton; while it had not as yet established itself as the largest North American Fringe (Day 2010), it was already open to alternative theatre, receiving regular funding through the Multiculturalism Directorate (Dolphin 1985:32-6).

When *Homeground* premiered at the Edmonton Fringe Festival, its original title was *Terra Straniera*, 'foreign land', an expression which had the opposite meaning. By changing the title of the play, Edwards reversed the semantics of the expression 'to be on one's homeground'. Staging the experiences of a group of first-generation Italian Canadians in Edmonton, *Homeground* is indeed far from being a play about characters feeling safely at home. The action takes place in the 1950s, in a boarding house in the middle of the Canadian prairies. Owned by Cesare and Maria, the locale lodges other Italian immigrants – Lucio, Mario, and Riccardo – and becomes a point of reference where Italian immigrants, like Candida, can meet fellow nationals. In this sense, the boarding house represents a site allowing the immigrants to develop wistful feelings towards Italy which reverberate within the locale itself. The boarding house occupies most of the stage and serves as a cocoon for the Italian protagonists of the play in which

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24 Brian Paisley is known in Western Canada for his contributions to the development of Canadian theatre, most notably as the founder of the Edmonton International Fringe Festival, which he modelled after the Edinburgh Fringe (Benson and Conolly 1990:110).

they are able indefinitely to maintain the illusion of their pre-emigrant status and to withdraw themselves from the hostile environment of their new Canadian context. The characters' nostalgic, idealised recreations of an Italian past, amidst the new, hostile environment of Canada, persuade them to move back to Italy, only to find that they no longer belong there either. The death of Lucio, who was suffering from depression, works as a sad epiphany for the characters. When they go to visit him in Sicily and discover that his Italian relatives had let him kill himself, they are deeply hurt. Maria and Cesare, in particular, who were used to meeting Lucio's physical and emotional needs, are devastated by the news and decide to leave Italy for good to return to Edmonton.

Homeground introduces us to characters that are to some degree afflicted by affectionate longings for earlier stages and scenes in their own lives, as well as for pleasurable experiences in familiar places and settings in their homeland, prior to emigration. Emigration represents a rupture in their existence, a profound rift in their understanding of life:

> LUCIO
> […] When I left home, in the station of Cittadella I'll never forget.
> […]
> My mother and Milva crying, me searching for something to say.
> […]
> MARIA
> And gradually you all began to sing, the relatives, friends the fiancées, everyone.
> (*H.*, scene II, pp. 10-1)

Caught in the memory of the moment of leaving, the characters are fused into one, united like the chorus of classical tragedy. Their relation with their own displacement seems to annul the geographical coordinates of the voyage, making movement in space coincide with death. Both the world they had previously abandoned and the world towards which they are now travelling merge within a single past-present continuum of lament, a mythologised dimension that works towards annihilating the traumatic experience of displacement. In this sense, the boarding house functions as an arrested

moment in history. As such, it oozes nostalgia for the fabricated 'good old days' that exist nowhere but in the ossified imaginations of the characters. It becomes, in the last instance, a retreat from the perpetual movement, disruption, and challenge of the new into an idealised world of the past. Thus, escapism results in the calcification of life itself, a mummification of the soul of the subject. The confining walls of the boarding house, by contrast, enhance the construction of an imaginary land in relation to Canada within which actions and gestures allow for a disharmonious physical and spiritual bonding to be developed – a bonding which clashes with the new environment of the prairies.

It is the specific and unique geography of this imaginary land that enables a reinterpretation of the Italian world they left behind. This imaginary land becomes a powerful spatial metaphor, an alternative to complete the emptiness and unmeaning left by emigration, and a dystopia in relation to Canada:

> MARIA
> No more ice, no more snow. No more six-month winters. No more emptiness. Home, home at last.
> CESARE
> I chose the perfect spot for our house before I left. With a view of our flower-filled valley.
> MARIA
> And within view of my father's farm, my sister's house. Home,
> CESARE
> At last.
> […]
> MARIA
> Home.
> *She turns to the cradle.*
> Little one.
> <div align="center">(H., scene I, p. 8)</div>

This exchange clearly shows what the characters of the play have retained from 'home': it is a selective vision which involves family, homeland, and a specific climate. Family is epitomised by building a house in the proximity of one's loved ones, which implies family togetherness. Homeland speaks for unity with the earth, and simple Italian living. Homeland as an image of 'home' seems to be an emotional, psychological shell of the

self, projecting the characters towards a brighter future. Their memory of homeland is seen here as a resistant relationship to the present, a simplistic utopianism that envisions a better future for the characters to be realised away from Canada. This becomes the primary catalyst in community life, as the obsessive repetition of the word 'home' seems to underline. Homeland is also a passport to hand over to the future generation. Interestingly, however, the representative of this future generation (the 'little one') is in a cradle in Canada. In this regard, the cradle separates the 'little one' from the other characters' idea of 'home' so as to reproduce the oscillation in the play between different 'homes'. The passage also shows that the identity of the characters in *Homeground* is bound up with a sense of place and time to be longed for. It is a selective sense of place and time, with a physical geography and climate emptied of winters. It is Italy as seen on postcard, with its mild, summer climate and euphoria which heavily contrast with Canada's harsh winters. Climate cannot be glanced over in Edmonton, and it is certainly ever-present in the prairies whose vastness can only emphasise the immense power exercised by the winter season over the microcosm of its inhabitants. The Italian immigrant characters in *Homeground* complain incessantly about this: they are all too aware that winter can kill and that the many Canadian stories of death in the snow are not hyperbole but reflections of reality. The play begins with reference to a friend of the characters', Gigietto, who died in Whitehorse, Yukon (*H.*, p. 11). Speaking of this fellow emigrant, Maria foreshadows Candida's designation of Canada as a 'God-forsaken place' (*H.*, p. 23), blaming Gigietto's death on displacement:

> I don't care what the coroner said. It was this country […]. To die so far from home. (*H.*, scene II, p 11)

In *Homeground* wistful feelings associated with looking back to a place or time in the past reflect a bittersweet, affectionate, positive relationship to what has been lost. They express a contrast between 'there' and 'here', 'then' and 'now', in which the absent is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, and more comprehensible

than its alternative in the present. Indeed, it is this indiscriminate idealisation of past time and lost place in the characters' recollections that turns Italy into a retrospective mirage. Mnemonic energy focuses on the lost home which, heightened by hindsight, now becomes coveted and is even attributed a degree of overcompensation in the figure of hyperboles through which 'reality simplifies, if not falsifies, the past' (Lowenthal in Shaw and Chase 1989:20).

A past reconstructed through the animating visions of the characters serves in the play as a creative inspiration 'called upon to provide what the present lacks' (Bal in Hodgkin and Radstone 2005:83). Candida best describes this sense of bereavement when she shares with Maria her preoccupation with their men having lost refinement as a consequence of their being in contact with the outside world of Edmonton: 'By the time we arrived, they had completely forgotten how a man should act around a lady' (*H.*, p. 24). The connection between the characters' new home and their degeneration is further elaborated by Candida when she says: '[…] this is still the frontier. We can't expect refinement' (*H.*, p. 23). It is difficult not to read her discourse as a classic instance of those split subjectivities, endangering to the rhetoric of the 'national character,' that emerge on the nation's borders. In this deterritorialising move outward (when they leave the boarding house to go hunting or go to Edmonton), the characters of *Homeground* establish a connection with the hostile Canadian setting, by breaking down the very frontiers that confined them in their 'home'. Territorialised, spatially confined to their Italian cocoon, the characters seem to be forever compromised by their hostile environment – their imaginary homeland no longer appears to protect them from the contradictions between their Italian selves and the negative effects of the Canadian prairies.[25] This regression is mirrored on stage by the men who, having returned from

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[25] 'Big sky and dry winds, open fields and closed people'. (Stuart 1984:102). This sentence summarises themes which are familiar to prairie regional literature in Canada. They intersect with alcoholism, isolation, loneliness, repression, lack of communication, and lost opportunities.

the hunt, are seen 'plucking feathers' and 'pulling out innards', profaning the holy Italian kitchen (*H.*, p. 21). Edmonton not only seems to have transformed this displaced community of Italian men, European farmers, into a bunch of crude huntsmen, but displacement itself also assumes the connotation of travel back towards a primitive stage of social development. Throughout the play, this involution is often condemned and ridiculed by the female characters, who seem to perform a sort of metaphorical emasculation on the clichéd virility of the Italian macho (*H.*, p. 61). Hence, attacks on the Italian manliness of the characters seem to reach them both from the outside and the inside of their home, overpowering them.

Just like the male characters, the female ones endure difficulties in executing their domestic and wifely rituals which appear to be compromised by external and internal threats. This is best articulated by Maria's repeated failures to perform rituals and to bake bread, and by Bianca's barrenness. Canada acts on both the characters by respectively limiting their rituals on stage and by poisoning the generative and catalytic components of their hopes for a future in Italy. Although Maria seems to be more resigned to life in Canada than her counterparts,[26] she avoids leaving her house, trying to maintain an intact, undiluted link with Italy through her reliance upon 'the old ways' (*H.*, p 58), i.e. her rituals, 'the ritual of water and salt' (*H.*, p. 78), but also through the family rituals of telling stories and singing Italian songs around the kitchen table. Relying on old wives' tales and rituals helps reinforce her belief that only in these old ways, 'oil and salt, flame and water' (*H.*, p. 78), is there any safety for herself and her family against the 'evil eye' (*H.*, p. 58) personified by the Canadian environment. Baking bread similarly represents a symbolic act, just as feeding the characters who

In a naturalistic fashion, Edwards shows us how these features of the foreign Canadian prairies affect her fictional community of displaced Italian Canadians.

[26]According to Pivato, Maria's attitude reveals a 'dispassionate pragmatism' which springs from her having experienced displacement in Italy (as a fourteen-year-old southern immigrant to Milan) prior to arrival in Edmonton (cf. *H.*, p. 28; Pivato 1999:64).

share the boarding house clearly means revitalising a decaying community; it also suggests that the characters can be purified from the contaminated air and demoralising weather conditions of Edmonton.

However, Maria never succeeds in performing any of her rituals – whether supernatural or domestic – on stage. The rituals, like the homemade bread, appear to have been affected permanently by the new environment (*H.*, p. 25). Just as the rituals seem doomed by Maria's being away from Italy, so the bread that does not rise properly foreshadows a metaphorical starvation of the Italian community. If Maria continues to be unable to prepare her Italian recipes, she will have to adopt Canadian recipes to feed the community. Hence, 'the old ways' will have to be abandoned or, even worse, will disappear in order to accommodate the dreaded Canadian lifestyle. As with Raffaele in *La Storia* and Antonio in *Gens du silence*, Maria's fears are motivated by a bigger threat: assimilation. This is already happening to the new generations, which are represented by Maria's children. In fact, these seem tragically – and under the very eyes of the whole Italian immigrant community in the house – to be transforming into a weird alchemical blend of Italian and Canadian rituals, in which home-baked Italian bread mutates into soggy doughnuts (*H.*, pp. 59-61). The failure of Maria's relentless attempts to safeguard a cosmogony of Italian motherhood seems to epitomise the loss of a life-preserving past that might nurture the community. Her unsuccessful witchcraft rituals also symbolise the retreat of the archetypal wise Italian woman, who no longer has the power to shelter the community from the threats of the new environment. Candida's barrenness, meanwhile, is supported by allusions to infertility throughout the play; these seem to echo the hostile Canadian environment as a place of arid, everlasting winters. They are also a consequence of her sexual life being inhibited by her alcoholic husband who, like the other men in the play, falls prey to a degenerative exposure to Alberta (*H.*, p. 29, pp. 33-4), an analogy carried out through the references to Maria's

unfruitful rituals. Continuing the contrast between the fruitfulness and healthiness of her Italian 'home' and the degenerative Canadian environment, Candida herself reinforces the contrast between fecundity and sterility. Edwards' association of infertility with death, affliction, and cold suggests the deep despair that barrenness provokes in the displaced community of Italian women who struggle to perpetuate the gender imperatives of their homeland (*H.*, p. 27). Under such cultural pressures, it is easy to understand Candida's temptation to generate, if not children, then an alternative imaginary land to Canada – a land consisting of naïve visions which reflect memories of her hot summers in southern Italy (*H.*, p. 55) and her dreams of a more exciting life in bustling cities like Rome (*H.*, p. 58). Reproductive locales like these contrast the fertility of her thoughts with the barrenness of her body and highlight the notion that her thoughts are her children. These thoughts,[27] their fertility and fruitlessness climax when she eventually becomes pregnant and decides to renounce a future in Canada to plan her return to Italy (*H.*, p. 56).

Lucio is the first victim in this struggle to maintain undiluted links with the characters' pre-emigrant status. His melancholia intensifies, with spleen leading to depression, depression leading to attempted suicide, and attempted suicide prefiguring death. Sent back to Italy in the hope that he might benefit from homecoming, Lucio is instead cruelly rejected, with devastating effects that lead him eventually to take his own life (*H.*, pp. 92-3). The disappointment that the characters express after this sad discovery is overwhelming. They had returned to Italy to make their dreams come true, but now realise that they no longer belong there. While in Canada, Lucio was alive at least because they were all taking care of him; when he attempted suicide for the first time, they all managed to save him from harming himself. There is no such help in Italy, where his relatives let him die. Italy and its inhabitants emerge as less socially

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[27] Candida's own name mirrors her candid, simple-minded nature, suggesting the Latin saying: *nomen omen*.

committed people than the Italian Canadian protagonists of the play. In fact, Lucio's relatives seem to lack the sense of community that the Italian Canadian protagonists of the play had developed in Edmonton. The fact that the characters no longer regard Italy as a place in which they can fit (*H.*, p. 92) challenges the prime motivation for their return to Italy, their desire to reconnect the dream of 'home' they had continued to keep alive in their minds to the sites they once held dear. Lucio's death confirms to them that Italy is not their past; and that the past is a foreign country. The end of the play seems to suggest that, while the characters' culture is being transformed in Canada, so is the culture they have left behind in Italy. In time, the protagonists come to identify more with the Italian Canadian world than with the Italian one. Only when they try, unsuccessfully, to return to Italy do they realise that Canada can after all be home.

IV

Nardi's *La Storia*, Micone's *Trilogie du silence*, and Edwards' *Homeground* offer no definitive statement on Italian Canadian communities in Canada; rather, they represent direct dialogue between Canada and a group of people who had not seen their lives represented outside of their own circumscribed communities: the 'lost generation' (2004:32), as Loriggio defines the Italian Canadian communities prior to the establishment of the Ministry for Multiculturalism. According to the *Toronto Star*'s theatre reviewer Vit Wagner, 'the Italians who had immigrated to urban centres like Toronto and Montreal or to other provinces during the 1950s and 1960s simply did not exist for theatre-goers' (1990: B12). Therefore, what Nardi, Micone, and Edwards did was to show these communities to themselves as well as to other Canadians. Their multicultural plays were representative of these communities, of the Little Italies the three Italian Canadian playwrights knew well because they had grown up in them. This knowledge, combined with their fleeting memories of the old country, Italy, they had

left when they were young, formed the core of a self-referential narrative that confronted the ongoing struggle to negotiate an Italian Canadian identity.

As I have been suggesting throughout this chapter, staging the nature of such a struggle is integral to the consideration of Italian Canadian communities as broad 'subject[s]-in-progress.' Their core values, beliefs and traditions changed, and these changes touched all aspects of their lives in Canada. Their inherited value system – termed la *via vecchia*, 'the old ways', age-old customs that were known to work – had helped them endure centuries of human-made and natural disasters in Italy and had ensured survival before immigration.[28] This system's main components were a strong attachment to family, a strict code of honour, a belief in destiny (or fate), and a reliance on old rituals. However, for both the playwrights and the Italian Canadian communities they served, it was now time to reconsider the system and to reflect on its relevance to a country which, partly through the recent institution of official multicultural policies, seemed to be opening up to its ethnic communities. The risk that la *via vecchia* could result in prejudice or bigotry on the part of the host society was high. Yet in the 1980s, the self-referential focus of Italian Canadian playwrights like Nardi, Micone, and Edwards was rarely directed towards a reification of their own Italian Canadian communities; they did not feel compelled to validate these communities' distinctiveness, even if their own family and neighbourhood histories informed the complex moral and cultural dynamics of their works. This is ultimately why *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* should be regarded as plays of character, of the kind in which Nardi, Micone, and Edwards excelled. Men and women as they appeared, and the environment in which they existed, were what primarily interested Nardi, Micone, and Edwards.

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[28] See *Introduction*, p. 11; see *Act I*, p. 74.

For the duration of their implied mandate as spokespeople for their communities, however, their work was subject to expectations and projections that posed a very real dilemma for them:

> If you are from inside the community you want the best possible image presented (*la bella figura*) and plays like *La Storia dell'Emigrante* remained subject to the expectations and projections of the Italian Canadian communities. Concurrently, if you are from the outside you want things that are easily recognizable by the mainstream culture at large. (Contento 1990:4A)

The main issue for Nardi, Micone, and Edwards was how to go about representing a community that was both fragmented within itself and separated from the rest of the country. They wanted to start from what they knew, but they also wanted to stage stories that were easily accessible to both Italian Canadians and a wider Canadian audience. Furthermore, they also felt that their communities should have the most accurate image available, whether this was for better or for worse.

While Italian Canadian theatre of the 1980s worked as a catalyst for some, it was regarded as mere folkloric display by others. Detractors accused Italian Canadian plays of functioning within a narrow institutional framework and pointed an accusatory finger at playwrights they saw as being responsible for the fetishisation of cultural differences that peddled easily identifiable notions of history, tradition, and authenticity in order to accumulate cultural capital for 'disenfranchised groups' (Hade 1997:43). As Gareth Griffiths has warned, productions such as these set their own traps, for they could 'overwrite and overdetermine the full range of representations' through which community identities were articulated (1994:72) and could thus disavow possibilities of moving beyond those circumscribed identities (76). Likewise, Smaro Kamboureli (2000) cautions that the notion of 'community' privileged in official multicultural discourse can lead to oversimplified narratives of origins, and that plays produced under these terms tend to emphasise the 'marketing and fetishization of communities to be displayed and consumed' (2000:65). Certainly, multiculturalism served as the preferred

way for Italian Canadian cultural centres, notably in Toronto and Montreal, to obtain public recognition; in this context, the productions of *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* fitted within this model of 'special interest' topics and events.

To some extent, state-funded plays like *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* were not defined as 'art'; rather, in the terms of The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), they represented 'folklore', cultural practice to be 'preserved'. Hade's, Griffiths's and Kamboureli's statements can thus be understood as indicating an anxiety over categorisation and labels which risk further marginalising works of art that distance themselves from their national referent. Kamboureli refers to this specific process as 'tokenism', i.e. 'assign[ing] a single meaning [to] cultural differences [which] masks the many nuances of difference' (1996:3). This anxiety over multicultural policies is more acute, as Sneja Gunew claims, in 'the official sanctioning of a cultural ghetto for non-Canadian writers which is to be patronised but only as a margin' (1992:166). The question for such critics is whether individuals or groups considered as operating within the framework of multicultural policies might not end up being marginalised further by being accorded a special status bestowed on them by the dominant culture. And just as critical discussion around the policies themselves is by now a well-developed discourse (Banting and Kymlicka 2010; Mac Key 2002; Siemerling 2005), doubts have also been cast on the commitment of dominant cultures, cultural agencies, and their artists to self-referential narratives of the kind I have been describing here. In Canada, the previously undisputed fact that multicultural policies were at least in part an attempt to rejuvenate the artistic scene by drawing upon the new energies of its ethnic communities is now receiving increased critical attention (Knowles 2010). Although due caution should be given to seeing such critical positions as representative, they might be taken as indicating that there has been a growing

concern over the implications of cultural projects like the ones fostered by the federal Ministry for Multiculturalism in Canada.

When the federal Liberals of Jean Chrétien entered office in 1993, they did so in a context in which multiculturalism was no longer the 'hot' electoral issue it had been in the 1970s and 1980s. The federal Liberals chose not to reinstate a separate Department of Multiculturalism. In its place, they created the Department of Canadian Heritage, in which several former departments and agencies merged.[29] Their response to the review of the multicultural programme became clear in 1995 when they commissioned a private company, Brighton Research, to perform an evaluation to review the programme, literature, and media coverage related to multiculturalism, as well as to conduct interviews with relevant individuals in government and non-governmental organisations, and to do a statistical analysis of the programme's funding patterns in order to chart the directions for future planning. What has become known as the Brighton Report was released in 1996.[30]

In taking the reasonable position that multicultural policy was not carved in stone, the report made it plain that certain 'adjustments were needed'. More specifically, it transpired that the emphasis of subsequent ethnic projects should now be placed on fostering 'attachment to Canada' as opposed to celebrating 'cultural difference'. The revamped programme should also aim to inculcate a sense of 'active citizenship' through 'processes which […] highlight community initiative'. Emphasis was placed on ethnic business leaders who had the potential to act as bridges to new markets:

> They are independent, self-reliant, active, and entrepreneurial. Within these emerging constructions of ethnicity there is a growing emphasis on the economic

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[29] The new mega-department comprises the Department of Multiculturalism, the Secretary of State, the Department of Fitness and Amateur Sport, the parks component of Environment Canada, and the cultural broadcasting components of the Department of Communications all merged. At present, the area of multiculturalism is overseen by a Secretary of State (a junior minister of the Conservatives not represented in Cabinet) who is responsible for multiculturalism and for the status of women.

[30] For the 25-year review, see the Brighton Report 1996 and commentary in Kordan (1997).

or potential economic contribution of individuals as the sum worth of a person. (1996)

This entrepreneurial idea occupies a crucial position, as well as being a key recommendation, in the Brighton Report. In many ways, this implies that the direct funding of ethnic projects is problematic. Indeed, as the policy states: 'future projects should seek partnership with private organisations', a further indication of how the concept of multiculturalism (measured primarily by funding) was now being touted as an economic boon. The 1980s programme which, among many other initiatives, had funded multicultural theatre projects through the Multiculturalism Directorate was now officially discontinued, and the Arts Council rebranded such initiatives as 'art projects' (1996). As political scientist Paolo Prosperi notes, a consequence 'for cultural agencies who were in the past the beneficiaries of core funding, [was that] those wanting secure funding from that point forward were to do so on a project-by-project basis, competing with non-ethnic projects for attention' (1999).[31] In this context, it should also be noted that, as with most areas of cultural spending in Canada, multiculturalism has been subjected to funding decreases. Thus, whereas in the early 1990s the budget for multiculturalism was about $27 million annually, by 1996-97 it had gone down to $18 million (Kordan 1997). This made it even more difficult for cultural agencies to be awarded consistent grants.

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[31] Cultural agencies across Canada did not support this change in policy. The Canadian Ethnocultural Council (CEC) is the national coalition of 33 umbrella organisations for ethnic groups, including AICA, the Association of Italian Canadian Artists. The CEC charged that their input was not taken into account in redesigning the programme. In particular they complained that the diminishing funding levels (an issue not addressed by the Brighton Report) were undermining multiculturalism generally and the 1988 Multiculturalism Act specifically:

> We can only but urge the Government of Canada to revisit the issue of funding, and more specifically the question of appropriate levels of funding which would enable the agencies of government, in partnership with Canada's ethnic communities, to carry out the mandate and provisions of the Act and which would give credence to the notion that the Government of Canada is truly committed to the objective of a multicultural society.
>
> (CEC in Kordan 1997)

That contemporary critical discourse around state multiculturalism was tainted by the revamped multicultural programme under the Chrétien Liberals is clearly reflected in the critical work by Griffiths, Hade, Kamboureli, and Gunew I have just discussed. These critics seem not only to cast doubt on the credibility of cultural agencies; their work also appears restricted to the comparison of different discursive formations around different multicultural policies at different periods of time. Such comparisons, as Foucault would see it (1989, 2000), instead of suggesting the contingency of a given way of thinking by showing that previous ages thought very differently, say little or nothing about the causes of the transition from one way of thinking to another, and seemingly bypass the process of emergence, 'ignor[ing] that a given system of thought is the result of incident turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends' (403). This seems to me to be a distinctive feature of the present way of thinking in which socio-political debate surrounding multiculturalism tends to be privileged over history, and over the many different ways in which ethnic cultural projects might have in fact challenged their national referent, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. After all, as Graham Huggan has argued, 'who or what should oblige a writer […] to explore his tangled cultural affiliations; to articulate a marginality he may not have experienced?' (2001:134).

In addition to this, in simply dismissing the 1970s and 1980s multicultural policies, three other pivotal changes that occurred at the time, and that would impact on later Italian Canadian theatre productions (to be discussed in the third and final *Act* of the thesis), run the risk of being completely overlooked. First, Italy emerged as a major economic power, having been one of the poorest countries in the developed world following the Second World War. *The Economist* in 1976 described Italy's both small and medium-sized industrial structure as the most dynamic in Europe. Fuelling this economic boom were exports of clothing, textiles, and furniture as well as robotics and

machine tools (Spotts and Wieser 1996). Italian fashion, food products, olive oil, ceramics, and cars also became highly sought-after status commodities. Second, Italy's national football team's victory in the World Cup roused Italian Canadians to gather on Toronto's St Clair Avenue and Montreal's rue Saint-Zotique to celebrate following the game. In their hundreds of thousands, Italian Canadians met on their *Corso Italia* to honk horns and wave Italian flags. The spontaneity of the event and its general peacefulness surprised both Italian Canadians themselves and the general public. The event became an epiphanic moment in which the Italian Canadian communities in those two cities claimed the public space it had formerly been told by police to abandon.[32] Third, Italian Canadians had also achieved some economic success and stability by this period. To be sure, in 1981 they still lagged behind the national average wage income ($11,990 to $12,306); but if one uses a more culturally sensitive indicator of mobility, home ownership, Italian Canadians showed significant economic advancement (Bagnell 1989; Esposito 1993b). By the mid-1980s as many as 86 per cent of Italian Canadians owned their homes, as compared to the 70 per cent national average.

Plays like *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* were certainly the outcome of state-determined cultural management and a grassroots response to the 'lived reality' of Italian ethnic communities. However, such plays tended by and large to avoid folkloricisation, instead questioning a selective past and allowing for a different present and a new future to be fashioned. While it is true that past, present, and future were put in conversation with one another, before suggesting possible modes of interaction, multicultural plays like *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground* needed first to present 'a model of performance and observation [of] object/subject'

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[32] This event resonated with the Italian Canadian community in Toronto particularly (see *Act I*). In the 1960s and 1970s, the recalcitrant attitude of Toronto's police force was linked, among other things, with their preconceptions of immigrants in general, and Italians in particular, being associated with illicit activity (Spotts and Wieser 1986:45, 56-7); also see, *Conclusion*, 'note 8'.

(Crew 1979:4A): to show who Italian Canadians were beyond their immediate communities. Hence, it could be said that, at the time at least, state multiculturalism provided an effective challenge to received wisdom about cultural relations in a country with only selective knowledge of itself.

While due caution should be exercised in claiming that the Ministry for Multiculturalism effectively allowed Italian Canadian theatre practitioners to incorporate their underrepresented histories and cultural traditions into institutionalised discourses in order to reflect the nation's diversity more accurately, history suggests that, through the system of payments which had been established by the federal Ministry for Multiculturalism, Nardi, Micone, and Edwards were all able to engage in the development of Italian Canadian plays destined for mainstream theatre. Following this perspective, Nardi went on to pursue a flourishing career as an actor (IMDb, 2013) after *La Storia* began to register attention in the mainstream theatre scene in Montreal and Toronto. Around the same time, as has been seen, Micone's *Addolorata* and *Déjà l'agonie* were all short-listed for the Governor General's Award, while, slightly later, *Addolorata* won the 1989 *Journal de Montréal*'s Grand Prix. And with Micone's trilogy also being translated into English through CEAD projects, Marco Micone became a major spokesperson on behalf of immigrant issues in Quebec.[33] Caterina Edwards did not continue to write plays, but, since *Homeground*, she has published numerous novels and has taken part in many theatre projects as a producer.[34] Speculations can only be made as to whether Italian Canadian theatre would have left the immediate vicinity of Italian Canadian communities without government support; certainly, plays such as the ones I have analysed are now contributing to enriching the cultural physiology of a

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[33] If the trilogy was positioned in the critical literature as an originating work in the Canadian exploration of migration (see first sub-section of this chapter), by the mid-1980s Marco Micone had been joined by a host of immigrant playwrights, including Anne-Marie Alonzo, Pan Bouyoucas, Abla Farhoud, Alberto Kurapel, and Wajdi Mouawad.

[34] See above, p. 160, 'note 23'.

country which has always been defined by its diverse, displaced, and uprooted communities, and by the multiple cultural affiliations through which individual and collective identities are formed, negotiated, and reshaped.

ACT III

The emergence of multicultural policies in the 1980s signalled an important reconfiguration of Canada's theatre scene to include state recognition of Italian Canadian theatre as a body of work by a group that was not French, not British, and not Aboriginal in origin. This process marked a departure from the explicit and implicit explicit privileging of Anglo-conformity that had framed Canadian national identity and nation-building thus far.

Over the period under examination in this chapter, 1993 to 2012, and following cutbacks aimed at ending funding to cultural agencies, the Chrétien federal Liberals also emphasised multiculturalism as a way to deal with markets and market competitiveness. Within this shift, the infrastructure of the multicultural policies of the 1980s was not completely torn down, but neither was it consolidated or strengthened. Instead, neo-liberal ideals were put forward by Ottawa including, but not limited to, the valorisation of a smaller welfare state.

Central to these new directions was a re-conceptualisation of the role of the state. The Chrétien years saw a shift from a strong interventionist state that actively attempted to manage the economy and was focused on redistributive concerns and equity, to a decentralised, less interventionist state which tended to prioritise 'market-driven prescriptions, economic efficiency, and unfettered competition.' (Soroka et al. 2006:282) Such neo-liberal ideals also stressed the commodification of social goods (e.g. health care, education, and welfare services) and the arts. In this process, as Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka put it: 'Canadians are treated less as citizens and more as individuals, clients, or customers.' (2010:66)

While the responses of neo-liberal principles to long-established policy areas like multiculturalism were almost solely couched in terms of economic processes (and

supposed economic imperatives), they certainly appeared to be associated with the perceived economic exigencies of globalisation. For the purpose of this chapter, my understanding of globalisation, for both good and bad, will be mediated by the fields of international relations and economics.[1] Within these disciplines, globalisation is generally taken to mean a phenomenon through which the influence of structures and movements of private capital is privileged at the expense of the agency (though not necessarily the status) of the nation-state in the world political order (Albrow 1994; Albrow and King 1990; Featherstone 1990; Featherstone et al. 2005; King 1991; Kofman and Youngs 1996; Robertson 1992; Spybey 1996).

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[1] Globalisation is commonly understood as 'a process in which economic, technological, socio-cultural and geopolitical paradigms amalgamate in a unified force that is turning the world into a single society' (Ashcroft et al. 1998:110). The classic globalisation theories of Francis Fukuyama (1992) and George Ritzer (1993) offer little assistance insofar as their analyses largely rest on the assumption that all socioeconomic and political power, and thus personal agency and cultural identity, only moves in one direction – from the west to the rest. Sociologist Ulf Hannerz provides an antidote to 'the rather prodigious use of the term globalisation to describe just about any process or relationship that somehow crosses state boundaries,' (2002:6) recognising not just that flows move in two directions, but that each strand in that flow can be further unpacked and may move through multiple paths. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller's *The Age of Migration* (2009) provides an up-to-date and wide-ranging book on globalisation, transnational community formations, and international migration around the world. Canada is not covered specifically, but Canadian issues and research are frequently cited. Peter Stalker has two short books on globalisation and international migration that also provide useful introductions to this topic: *Workers without Frontiers: The Impact of Globalization on International Migration* (2000), and the shorter, more introductory *The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration* (2002). Stalker's web-site provides highly readable, updated information on many of the topics covered in his books: [http://pstalker.com/migration/mg_about_ps.htm]. For a critical perspective on many of the issues he covers, see Saskia Sassen's *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (1998).The volume by John Biles et al. (eds.), *Immigration and Integration in Canada in the Twenty-frst Century* (2008), contains eight original papers by researchers on various aspects of immigrant economic, political, and social integration with a particular focus on Canadian state policies, accompanied by substantial introductory and concluding chapters by the editors. Jeffrey Reitz adds to what might otherwise be a short book on Canadian immigrant settlement in the form of a research review published as back-to-back journal articles: see Reitz (2007). Peter Li's *Destination Canada: Debates and Issues* (2003) covers many of the topics addressed in this chapter from the perspective of transnational migrants, and including topics such as the social construction of immigrants and the impact of immigration on the total economy, which are not specifically covered here.

Under the Chrétien Liberals, there was a much clearer link fostered in Canada between globalisation, ethnic groups and immigration, and their implications for multiculturalism, which made more explicit use of an emergent globalisation discourse than had already existed in the 1970s and 1980s. This discussion emphasised the need to secure border-free economies, thereby enhancing competitiveness and cost-effectiveness, and appealed to a flexible, highly skilled workforce from abroad. In this regard, Canada seemed to be emulating the strategy of the Australian government, which since the 1980s has been emphasising multiculturalism in relation to 'productive diversity' (Huggan 2001:105), i.e. the valuing of ethnic groups and immigrants alike as citizens who can contribute to national and global economic competitiveness by showing they possess a business mentality (105-21).

In this respect, the 1993 rebranding of the Department of Multiculturalism as the Department of Canadian Heritage may be read as heavily symbolic. As Michel Dupuy, the first minister of the Department of Canadian Heritage, noted at the time: 'the Department of Canadian Heritage is the flagship of Canadian identity.' (3 October 1994). From this point of view, it can be gathered how advancement of ethnicity no longer rests on explicitly promoting attachment to the national referent, but also implies attachment to foreign markets, as a product to export. And as the first Chrétien Liberal Secretary of State, Sheila Finestone, remarked in a speech in 1994:

Today […] multiculturalism means business. In confronting the challenges of globalization, Canada must make the most of the competitive edge of its multicultural population. (4 March)

This perspective was also subsequently taken up by the then Secretary of State, Hedy Fry, who emphasised the cost-effectiveness of ethnicity in terms of corporate business strategies. Fry favourably noted in 1996 that:

Following the federal government's leadership in endorsing the importance of ethnicity, Canadian businesses are seeing the value of managing ethnicity effectively. Many companies have improved their productivity and

competitiveness by linking diversity to corporate strategies, especially in marketing and international business. (3 April)

In 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien continued the theme by arguing that 'in the global economy, maintaining our diversity enhances our trading connections with other countries.' (18 October) Activities pursued under the rubric of strengthening business ties and marketing included updating the 'multiculturalism means business' directory of ethnic and professional business contacts, establishing a business community network around ethnic cultural projects in partnership with foreign countries.

A key implication of this assessment was that people with certain characteristics and attributes were particularly valued, a reflection of which could be seen in Canada's turn-of-the-millennium immigration policy. Perhaps this had been true ever since the late 1960s, when arguably the most important change in Canadian immigration policy took place. Over that decade, Canada passed from a preference for 'white' immigrants to a points system based on criteria such as educational qualifications, occupational skills, and language ability (Banting and Kymilcka 2010:49; Chinook Mtd 2010). The revised policy allowed people from all countries of the world to apply for entry to Canada, regardless of ethnic or racial background. However, while observed trends in immigration were still being affected by the points system, a new item of legislation was added to the policy in 2001:

> Immigrants who are highly skilled, well-educated, have job experience, and can speak one of the official languages are sought. […] Preference is given to the human capital strengths of independent applicants. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013)

With such measures still permeating Canada's immigration policy at the time of writing (2013), it is easy enough to understand how the country appears to have embarked on a project of trying to attract wealthy investors and entrepreneurs to Canada. Yet it is more difficult to gauge the degree to which the current situation can

solely be ascribed to the privatisation of the tertiary sector and to changes put forward by policy-makers (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2013:130).

As stated by Ulf Hannerz in *Cultural Complexity* (1992), his seminal work on the production of meaning in an increasingly globalised world, 'globalisation also involves other critical dimensions, including global cultural flows of people, images, and ideas' (13); and while the role of global cultural movement appears to have been overshadowed in current cultural policies in Canada, with regard to multiculturalism at least, it is clear that the relevance of cultural projects, and their inherent nature and interest, has mutated over the last twenty years. The continuing importance of Canadian traditions and the kinds of connections that have historically developed between state institutions and ethnic groups in Canada have not yet been abandoned, but the earlier incarnations and emphases of cultural projects, including theatre, now reflect changes in policy, and variations in the composition, current aspirations, and exigencies of both recent immigrants to Canada and long-established ethnic groups.

This is particularly the case with Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal, whose theatre projects over the last twenty years confirm this pattern. I want to suggest in this final *Act* that an informed understanding of contemporary globalisation processes might help shed more light on how Italian Canadian theatre projects have reflected variations that are not necessarily new, but are nonetheless distinct from multicultural Italian Canadian theatre. Increasingly, these understandings are being challenged as the policy practices brought about by globalisation are being reconfigured in complex and uneven ways. As such, there has been a recent intensification of theatre works that transcend, but do not always completely supersede, the state or its sovereignty while at the same time offering a vision of how globalisation – through economic, political, and cultural processes – affects Italian Canadian communities today.

I

Before looking at the specificities of what it means for the three Italian Canadian playwrights analysed in this chapter to write, stage, and produce the work that I shall categorise later as transcultural theatre, I first need to address the social conditions that brought about the emergence of such practices. In particular, I want to address the linked phenomena of transnationalism, transnational migration, and transnational identity with which globalisation is often associated, though by which it is not necessarily defined.

Historically, globalisation has always been inextricably linked to migration, but with the development of 'New World' forms of globalisation, which are centred on North America, migratory patterns have shifted considerably. To clarify, previous periods of migration indicated a settler-sojourner model, 'a single discrete event involving movement from one geographically and socially bounded locality to another' (Gold and Nawyn 2013:6). In this context, the term internationalism was used to emphasise the social impact on migrants, 'link[ing] together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch et al. 1994:7). Internationalism was mainly regarded as a dual process by which individuals and/or families would cross borders, establishing significant communities of migrants in the regions of origin and destination, and travelling regularly back and forth between two nation-states. However, more recent patterns of migration are perhaps better understood via the concept of transnationalism, whereby 'ethnic communities exchange concerns, relationships, resources and needs that are immersed in multiple settings' (Gold and Nawyn 2013:6).

Discussions around transnationalism have intensified over the last twenty years, adding several different layers of meaning to the world. Transnationalism can thus be looked at as a basis for political action (Kastoryano 2002; Malkki 1996; Vertovec 1999), a philosophy, a point of view, a state of consciousness (Caccia 1997; Huggan

2007, 2013), and a form of cultural survival (Bhabha 1994). As the various viewpoints

on transnationalism develop, all parties agree that the term is multi-faceted, while some

admit that it has perhaps been over-used in recent years to describe a plethora of

disparate migratory activities. Consequently, transnationalism has the potential to lose

its original meaning. To take just two examples, Wolfgang Welsch focuses on the

economics of 'socio-cultural and political practices that transcend the jurisdiction of the

nation-state' (1999:209), whereas Peggy Levitt takes a collective approach to the term

by studying the emergent behaviours of migrants as 'transmigrants,' individuals who

engage regularly in cross-border activities (Levitt 2001:6). I am not rejecting such

views, but my understanding of transnationalism will primarily rest on its political and

geographical dimensions as these are the main catalysts for the primary material I

analyse in this chapter.

Is transnationalism a new phenomenon? Catherine Nolin maintains that

contemporary migration differs from the settler-sojourner model in that transnationalism

has given rise to the proliferation of 'transnational communities'. These communities

> are dense networks across political borders created by migrants in their quest for
> economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an
> increasing number of people are able to live different lives. Participants are often
> bi- or trilingual, […] frequently maintain homes in different countries, and pursue
> economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in all of them.
> (2006:36)

These differences are accentuated by the sheer number of people involved, the near-

instantaneous character of communication across space, and the fact that the cumulative

character of the process makes participation normative within certain migrant groups

(Nolin 2006).

Transnationalism per se may not be new, but the construction of 'transnational

communities' by migrants is a relatively recent process '[d]riven by the very forces

promoting globalization, as people are caught in their web and learn to use new

technologies […]:'

The aphorism "capital is global, labor is local", may still hold on the aggregate, but it is being increasingly subverted by these grassroots initiatives based on long-distance networks and a newly acquired command of communications technologies. (Portes 1997:813-814)

According to Lawrence Lam and Anthony Richmond (1995), the processes linking migrants to their host countries are transnational in the sense that they are deployed above and beyond the nation-state. This crossing of borders, and as will be seen, cultures, is made possible by the increasingly ready availability of means of communication and new technologies that have significantly contributed to the overall compression of time and space (Laguerre 1995:1-2). In this context, a policy of the simultaneity of practices has replaced the earlier one of succession that prevailed in the critical discourse around internationalism. Individuals now appear to demand or appropriate political, cultural, and social rights in many different countries, and they frequently develop multiple identities that reflect the various border-crossing processes that constitute their daily lives.

Consequently, both transnationalism and transnational communities require a redefinition of the concept of citizenship which acknowledges the different ways in which people maintain links in multiple settings. Laguerre suggests that contemporary social and cultural practices are not congruent with traditional citizenship and that it would be better to speak of transnational citizenship. This new form of citizenship is the result of global processes:

> In the areas of politics, economic restructuring, information technology, and transnational migration; of cultural flows to which the nation state is a participant; and of transnational practices of citizen-subjects. […] These global transformations and the crisis of the nation state provide the international context in which these practices take place and transnational citizenship takes a hold. (Laguerre 1995:13, 28)

Levitt, for her part, settles on the idea of a post-national civic membership, an emergent form of 'participation and representation that [does] not require citizenship,'

that 'guarantee[s] a set of basic rights', and that supersedes the nation-state (2001:5). In keeping with this premise, Charles Tilly offers the metaphor of a honeysuckle vine whose 'networks [have] moved, changed shaped and sent down new roots without entirely severing the old cones' (Tilly 1990:85).

Although examples of countries being influenced by overseas citizens are well documented – not least in Canada, a country historically seen as a country of migration – transnational migration has facilitated the steady and continuous influence of migrant communities on the culture and daily life of their countries of destination (Glick Schiller et al. 1995:48). Transnational migration is further supported in this task by the implementation of official (government-sanctioned) exchanges. Such exchanges emphasise the fact that migrants

> remain intensely involved in their community of origin, be it a nation-state or a deterritorialized collective regardless of their actual domicile. Whether migrants go overseas to glean resources for benefit of a hometown, region or state or to search out a territory that offers greater geographical footing, it is evident that the transnational migrant resides in more than one nation-state. (Gold 2000:74)

However, critics of the post-nationalist perspective consider these premises to be too general. Pessar, for example, contends that although 'migrants' social and economic lives are not bounded by national borders' (Pessar in Levitt 2001:5), the nation-states that receive them are by no means superfluous. Host countries play a significant part in creating lasting transnational involvements, as do civic, religious, and political institutions. Recent studies further indicate that migrants who consider themselves legitimate members of host societies 'continue to be active in their countries of origin from their base' (Levitt 2001:5).[2]

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[2] It is in this context that the notion of diaspora has been put back on the agenda, e.g. with the aim of moving away from the majority/minority ethnic group oppositions which are arguably a feature of national societies. This renewal has occurred under the strong influence of the Birmingham School, a group of researchers associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, who have mapped cultures of resistance in disparate sites of cultural

Those in support of transnational migration argue optimistically that, although there is still significant opportunity for socio-cultural collision, transnational migration opens new possibilities of interconnection and exchange and that the communities formed as a result of it are becoming 'a prominent feature of the global society' (Cohen 1997:175). Moreover, these migrations are developing new forms of communication that bridge the gap between the particular and the universal (Cohen 1997:175). Others are less positive. As transnational communities both maintain links with their place of origin and continue to develop new associations and affiliations, their overall sense of 'self' comes inevitably into question. Globalisation and transnational migration have done away, and rightly so, with those notions of a 'pure race' and 'pure culture' that had typically been associated with bounded territory (Hall 1992). As a consequence, with harmony no longer being defined by uniformity, people now construct their identities and communities by defining their interests in ways that exceed the priorities of the nation-state (Schulze-Engler and Helff 2009).

Yet it is important to note that, while understandings of the world are increasingly shaped by transnational social relations, not every migrant or person associated with a migrant is necessarily deeply engaged in transnational flows, communities, or ideologies. Some migrants leave their home country and never look back. Others carry memories, but have no close friends, family members, or other forms of belonging in their home country. Still others have family and friends with whom they stay in close touch and support in every way they can. Those most deeply involved in transnational activities own property, do work, and are politically engaged in communities in at least two different nations. In sum, following the caution offered by Nolin, we must take care not to 'inflate' the concept of transnational migrant or

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production. Several attempts at typologies have since emerged (Gilroy 1987; Clifford 1994; Grewal and Kaplan 1997; Kaplan 1996; Laguerre 1998; Tölöyan 1996), but scholars generally agree that diaspora, unlike transnational migration, is a one-way process.

transnational community to include everyone (2006:36). There is wide variation in transnational practices and affiliations. We are just beginning to learn about this variation and its implications.

It can safely be concluded, nonetheless, that transnationalism and transnational migration are fundamentally transformative, affecting the regions of origin and destination as well as the migrants themselves. According to Lam and Richmond, 'transnational migration is one of the most dynamic forces shaping modern societies, establishing communities of emigrants and immigrants whose numbers have reached a threshold level that has impacted surrounding non-migrant communities' (1995:268). This is a key insight for this chapter, and, as such, it will need further consideration with regard to the globalisation processes that have affected Italian Canadian communities over the last twenty years. As these communities in Toronto and Montreal, and most of the long-established ethnic groups in Canada, are continually fed by new participants through the general process of mobility, transnational migrants create a back-and-forth movement of transmission, attitudes, cultural behaviours, and syncretic ideas.

II

Ever since the adoption of race-neutral admissions criteria (the points system) in the late 1960s, the demographics of immigrant population have never been the same in Canada. Other factors that have affected this change are the increasing presence of refugees and a reduced immigration from Europe as a result of the continent's post–Second-World-War economic recovery (Banting and Kymlicka 2010:49-50). About 70 percent of the immigrant population that has settled in Toronto since the 1990s originally came from Africa, Central and South America, while the influx of immigrants from Europe has been steady, at 30 percent (Statistics Canada 2013). Similarly, only 20 percent of Montreal's 2006 immigrant population who arrived between 1991 and 2006 came from Europe. In both cities the proportion of African immigrants in the 2006

immigrant population increased dramatically, from 10 percent of those who arrived in the 1980s, to over 20 percent of those arriving between 1991 and 2006.[3]

In contrast, both Toronto and Montreal have seen an increase of transnational migrants from Europe over the last fifteen years. In line with Canada's revamped multicultural policy,[4] today a significant proportion of these migrants, with Italians being no exception, consists of 'educated professionals, versed in the language, culture and patterns of consumption of the host society' (Gold 2000:76). They still occupy many of the inner-city Toronto neighbourhoods and the traditional Boulevard St-Laurent immigrant corridor in Montreal. In terms of housing, they divide sharply between those who behave like settlers and those who retain the attitudes of transient visitors. Yet they have all contributed to a gentrification of those areas which no longer represent a viable option for the majority of the new immigrant population in Canada:

> [European migrants] have developed an urban culture for which housing is rarely more than a short-term hired space […]. They rent flats rather than buy them, always ready to be on the move again. (Richmond 2005:23)

Steven Gold contends that this new group of 'high-level' migrants from Europe is often in possession of substantial capital and has the ability to exert political-economic influence in both the country of origin and the country of settlement (2000). Portes also notes that this has allowed migrants to avoid professional dead-ends (1997:813). In actuality, and as discussed earlier, 'high-level' migrants are often employed specifically for the purpose of developing and maintaining transnational links between their countries of origin and long-established ethnic communities in the host society. In Canada, they often work in fields involving multiculturalism, ethnic

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[3] In part, this pattern reflects the fact that the Quebec government can select its own economic-class immigrants and, to some extent, refugees (Richmond 2005; Rose et al. 2006:4). As a consequence, Montreal attracts more immigrants from Francophone countries and former French colonies in the Caribbean (Haiti), Northern Africa (Algeria and Morocco), and the Middle East (Lebanon).

[4] See *Act II*, pp. 172-3.

assistance associations, and bilingual education – fields which encourage ethnic communities, immigrants, and their children to retain skills useful in interacting with their countries of origin. This is considered a significant advance over earlier migrant and immigrant populations (Losacco 2003).

Another element that marks the difference between contemporary transnational migrant populations and their recent predecessors is the fact that the new group can often obtain citizenship with relative ease. Yet the priority of these new European migrants no longer seems to lie in becoming naturalised citizens of the host country; on the contrary, they obtain citizenship in order to facilitate their access to other countries and societies. For example, travel throughout the Americas is considered to be 'much easier when holding a Canadian passport […]'. Accordingly, 'a resident alien who is content to live his/her life within Canadian borders has far less incentive to acquire Canadian citizenship than does a co-national who intends to make regular trips to the country of origin' (Gold 2000:76-77).

Phone, cable, fax, email, satellites, and international banking systems have all helped to bring countries previously remote from Canada significantly closer; and, unlike before, new technologies are also affordable to a wider range of transnational migrants and immigrants alike. At the same time, transnational migration and the daily interconnection of communities 'across the pond' have been greatly facilitated by the presence of low-cost, high-speed systems of communications and transport, which have also enabled 'lower-level migrants' to develop 'international ties to accomplish economic, familial and status-related goals' (Gold 2000:77). 'High-status' and 'low-status' migrants might easily be sitting next to each other on a plane taking them from Europe to Canada, hence facilitating cross-contacts within heterogeneous social groups.

Another unforeseen form of contemporary migration in Canada involves the country's student foreign exchange programme and the welcoming of international

students into its colleges and universities. Introduced as an attempt to heighten prestige (as well as to collect international student fees), this system has in fact created a single lane of human flow, with an increasing number of international students graduating from Canadian universities deciding to remain and seek employment in Canada. Many students have this intention to begin with when entering a university in Canada and, while the job market becomes increasingly more competitive as a result, the other side of the coin is that many European countries, including Italy, are now being faced with a 'brain drain.'[5]

Many scholars studying contemporary migration patterns argue that one of the recent effects of globalisation has been to disperse large groups of people who are making little effort to assimilate into the social, political, and economic systems of host countries (Hannerz 2002; Gold and Nawyn 2013). Instead, these people retain links to networks, cultures, and political aspirations beyond the borders of their present location. Their mobility enables them to resist the trends associated with the dominance of nation-states, multi-national corporations, and global cultures, and to maintain a greater degree of self-determination and autonomy.

According to Hannerz, transnational migrants are 'shaping […] the relations between countries, people, regions, and political frameworks' (2002:86). The fact that such migration is by definition difficult to control, is becoming an unnerving prospect for many countries. It is noteworthy in this regard that even in Canada there has been a

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[5] 'Brain drain' refers to 'the emigration of a large number of a country's highly skilled and educated population to other countries that offer superior economic and social opportunities' (Gold 2000:85). For more on 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' literature (the latter arguing that such emigration brings numerous benefits to the sending society in terms of social welfare, higher wages, education, and skill level), see Manon Domingues Dos Santos and Fabien Postel-Vinay (2003), 'Migration as a Source of Growth: The Perspective of a Developing Country,' *Journal of Population Economics*. 16, (1), pp. 161-75; Jean-Pierre Vidal (1998). 'The Effect of Emigration on Human Capital Formation,' *Journal of Population Economics* 11 (4), pp. 589-600; Donald Lien and Yan Wang (2005) 'Brain Drain or Brain Gain: A Revisit,' *Journal of Population Economics* 18 (1), pp. 153-63.

clear protectionist shift in immigration policy over the past decade in an effort to contain the influx of cheap labour, especially from Europe (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

The Canadian government is also active on the ideological front, seeking to enhance the value of its passport and to define and promote Canadian citizenship along with its underlying values and obligations. The Standing Committee of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Canada 1994) has even recommended that Canadians holding dual citizenship give precedence to their Canadian citizenship, and that one of the conditions for obtaining Canadian citizenship be the acknowledgement of this principle by immigrants who opt for naturalisation. This offensive goes beyond the issue of controlling immigration; as noted earlier, it is closely linked to promoting 'an attachment to Canada', which connects in turn to the neo-liberal shift currently affecting the management of the state, but also governing First Nations issues and Quebec.

This behaviour is giving rise to different and opposing interpretations. For some, it is seen as a way to compensate for 'loyalty deficit' (Harper, 10 November 2012) towards Canada. For others, it is deemed to be a reaction against an excessive allegiance to the country of origin, or perhaps a response to migrants expressing preference for multiple citizenships. In addressing a group of newly arrived university researchers in 2012 – for statistical purposes university researchers are regarded as migrants – Stephen Harper requested of them to hold 'ancient affections' for the country from which they had come, but also that 'their hearts' should now be 'centered nowhere but in the emotions and the purposes and the policies of Canada.' (Harper, 10 November 2012) The effects of Harper's current leadership are only beginning to emerge, and it is as yet premature to predict how it will impact on Canadian migration. Be that as it may, transnational communities have prospered in Canada over the last fifteen years, which seems to suggest that, for a period of time at least, it will be possible for 'hearts' and

'affections' to traverse Canadian borders, and for further transnational practices to emerge.

III

Recently, sociologists have been researching the connections between transnational migration and Canada's long-established ethnic groups. Substantial work, particularly in the Vancouver region, has examined transnational ties, notably among members of the Chinese community who have been the leading single immigrant group over the past twenty years (Ley 2000; Ley and Waters 2003; Mitchell 1997; Waters 2002, 2003; Wong 1997, 2002). Other contributions have demonstrated the diverse linkages between Greater Vancouver and the Punjab (Walton-Roberts 2003), also the transnational fields of much smaller groups such as the Burmese (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000). One of the few Canadian studies with a larger sample considered the overseas linkages of more than 400 immigrants to Quebec, including the scale of home country travel, remittances, and property ownership, ten years after landing (Rose et al. 2006).

While case studies have demonstrated the emergence of transnational activities among the largest ethnic communities, they have apparently failed to see that the majority of transnational practices involve migrants from Europe who, as stated earlier, represent the largest transnational migration influx to Canada. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the relationship between transnational practices and the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal.

Toronto and Montreal have both seen a significant change in the geographical distribution of their ethnic communities; the Italian Canadian population is no exception. No longer confined to older inner city immigrant corridors, Italian Canadian communities now include substantial concentrations in inner wealthy suburbs. In the

Toronto area, proportions run as high as 54 percent in Vaughan in 2001 and 47 percent in York, while in the northeastern section of Montreal, the figure is 46 percent in Ville-Émard, Saint-Léonard and Rivière-des-Prairies (Ley and Tutchener 2001; Rose 2006 et al.).

Historically, as I have previously shown, Italian Canadian communities developed around institutions that bound them together, deciding to live with members of their own ethnic group.[6] The movement of people to suburban areas is the result of many personal choices and aspirations: more space, a larger house, an easier commute to work (Santucci 2010:77). However another, often whispered, reason for some is that they wish to 'live at home away from home' (Esposito 1993b), meaning that the enlargement of dwellings and personal property in spatially planned suburbs has led to the reduction of familiar interactions with neighbours and friends.

During my research in Vaughan, I met Carlo Barzaglia, an immigrant who had left Lazio in 1953, now a successful plumbing contractor and treasurer for the Italian Canadian association in Toronto. Barzaglia's view of the changes which had taken place in his Italian Canadian community reflected what some journalists (Chianello 1995:15; Di Manno 1997:1, 8; Esposito 1993b:22) have been saying for the past fifteen years: 'we are more neglectful of the values of hard work, community, and culture' (Barzaglia, 23 July 2011). For the post-war immigrant generation who worked in the physically demanding construction and manufacturing sectors or in metal foundries and rural work camps,[7] generational differences, and their specific meanings, still play an important part in the everyday lives of Italian Canadians. However, this picture only offers a partial depiction of the changes in force:

> Italian Canadians are no longer the new immigrants. They no longer struggle to make ends meet. The children of second-wave immigrants are now an integral part of the new face of Canada. They are involved in the political decision making

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[6] See *Act I*, p. 72.
[7] See *Act I*, p. 70.

and the financial, academic, artistic, and cultural makeup of their communities. The name of developers such as Tridel, Del Zotto, Fram, Metrus, Con-Drain, Tace, Con-Elco, Bot, Pemberron Group, Camrost, Marel, Green Park, and many others are witness to the strength of the Italian Canadian communities across Canada. (Santucci 2010:76)

While the last fifteen years may have seen Italian Canadians begin to participate in the North American consumer market, this is not always phrased as a desire to live away from other Italian Canadians, but rather as an overall improvement of their living conditions, sometimes as a natural desire to integrate.

In Canada, the term 'integration' is taken to mean 'multicultural integration', that is, 'living peacefully with other ethnic groups and engaging in civic citizenship while either retaining one's cultural identity or assimilating' (Biles et al 2008:140). The emergence of transnational practices among long-established ethnic communities like those of the Italian Canadians takes this understanding a step further. While immigration from Italy to Canada has been almost nonexistent since the 1990s, the composition of long-established ethnic groups such as the Italian Canadians has been altered all the same by transnational migrants who have been replenishing their co-ethnic communities steadily since the late 1990s (Losacco 2003:173). Particularly, Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal have attracted economic classes of independent and business migrants, in line with both new immigration policy and the 1997 multicultural policy:

Italian Canadians have developed successful businesses with Italian multinationals […], a stronger import/export performance, in turn creating greater business opportunities for their local suppliers and numerous business partners in Italy, Canada, and all over the world. Together with other core functions, we need to acknowledge that in today's world of globalization, each organisation/individual is subject to an increased network of contacts on the move. (Santucci 2010:80)

Hence it becomes apparent that Canada has become the setting for gateway cities with a large, newly landed population adding to existing co-ethnic communities,

providing a fertile laboratory for transnational activities of different kinds. This is because, at least in part, the concept of transnational communities bridges different markets and cultures. Transnational individuals do not just live in one market or society spread across nations, they also live in at least two different national economies, political formations, and cultures. Transnational migrants draw attention in this way to duality: their actors are both 'here' and 'there', and are thus in constant negotiation with others, who are then themselves increasingly transnational, thereby creating a hypermobile world which is increasingly understood and accepted by them both.

Sociologists prefer the term 'incorporation' (Biles et al. 2008:269) to 'integration' to define the emergence of such reciprocal practices. If incorporation is usually understood in terms of transverse relationships between individuals within a *single* space, transnational incorporation may be seen as 'a dynamic process of flows, communication, and shifting personal relationships and identities and across individuals located in *two or more* national spaces' (2008:270; emphasis mine). This view of transnational incorporation is broadly consistent with the ways in which cultural theorists have understood globalisation and transnationalism.

IV

Theorists investigating transnational processes insist that some adjustment to the foreign or local is inevitable and desirable. The meshing of the global and the local, crystallised in the somewhat clumsy coinage 'glocal' (Andrews and Ritzer 2007:137; Hannerz 2003:228), seems an essential condition for the emergence of a transnational state. In the context of the nation-state, transnational migrants are regarded as a 'third culture' (Bhabha 1994:37) that mediates between people from different nations, or professionals who must take account of the local practices of the cultures in which they find themselves. In *Nations Unbound* (1994), Linda Bash, Nina Glick Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc define this mediation as a process by which

migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations [which] emphasize [how] many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. (7)

In the view of these authors, migrants, who are often explicitly or implicitly engaged in the building of nation states, construct new identities under the influence of established categorisations in the settlement societies (race, ethnicity, nation) and the attitudes of the host population. In the current context of globalisation, these practices, and the multiple identities associated with them, frequently translate into activities which challenge racism, economic insecurity, the selectivity of immigration policies, and the negative effects of a greater penetration of global capital.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994)*,* the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha contends that '[t]he very concepts of homogeneous national culture, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities […] are in a profound process of redefinition […]' (5). Transnational migration recognises identity as a process and embraces fragmented identities that can cross geographical, cultural, and political borders where they continually mix and blend cultures. If identities are dynamic, multiple, and historically situated, then the focal point within any given national identity should be the negotiation and compromise of interrelationships, entailing an understanding of the past as formed of a comparably fluid and overlapping network of stories.

Bhabha foregrounds transnational migration as a form of cultural survival:

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration […], diaspora, displacement, relocation - makes the process […] a complex form of signification […] rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement [...]. (1994:6)

A growing sense of 'cultural displacement' has similarly been evident in the creative work of Italian Canadians over the last fifteen years, marking yet another shift in their cultural mindset. While post-war Italian Canadian intellectuals responded to

immigrants' need to have their voices translated, the current wave is younger, having arrived in Canada aged twenty-five to forty-five, from Italy or after travelling internationally; they are also 'more critical, disillusioned, and for the most part confused' (Santucci 2010:83). Transnational migrants from Italy, more specifically, meet the requirements of the points system fully. While their cultural work positions itself from within 1997 multicultural policy, they beckon for a displaced generation to challenge the status quo – migrant, ethnic, and non-ethnic – and their voices echo with uncertainty at entering Canada in the context of a globalisation and resentment at not fitting comfortably within the ethnic world. It is from this settlement between transnational migrant and ethnic subject that Italian Canadians, over the last fifteen years, have ventured onto and beyond the frontiers of cultural identity, only to discover the impossibility of finding a secure and fertile cultural ground.

To a certain extent, their cultural milieu replicates the same confusion experienced by earlier generations on a daily basis. Giovanni 'John' Montesano, the editor of *Eyetalian*, a progressive Italian Canadian magazine established in Toronto, in 1993,[8] suggests that much of the confusion felt by both past and present generations is caused by searching for an identity that no longer exists:

> The magazine was not about identity, and it still isn't. It is about the impossibility of identity. Which means we're not out there trying to find the exact Italian Canadian identity, we're saying that being Italian in Canada makes up a small part of who we are. The prototype Italian Canadian does not exist, because how one reacted to the experience was very individualistic. I don't know if this is an Italian Canadian thing. We saw Italians in a foreign country not acting Italian, acting like immigrants in this foreign country, and we learnt about these people who were displaced and were acting out the anxieties about being displaced. It was a very particular experience though that had more in common with other immigrants than us. (Montesano 1993:22)

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[8] At first the quarterly magazine's headquarters were in a rented house in Toronto. Now *Eyetalian* has established branches in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, and has begun to nurture its relationship with some of the established institutions in the cities. The dysphemism 'Eyetalian' caused some in the older generation to wince with displeasure (Esposito 1993a). It was too similar to the derogatory pronunciation they had often heard from other Canadians when they wanted to belittle Italian immigrants in the difficult years of the Fifties (Esposito 1993a). However, it is partly for this very reason that the editors chose the term, as a means of emptying it of its derogatory context (Montesano 1993:22).

Montesano was born in Italy, and was twenty-five years old when he took on the job as an editor for *Eyetalian* in Toronto. He held the job for five years, and then moved to New York, where he spent seven years of his life; he currently resides in Montreal. The magazine and its contributors reject the burden of being the voice of identity, perhaps because, as Italian migrants, they feel isolated and not completely supported by the Italian Canadian communities with which they engage. They see their experiences as singular and particular, yet do not seem to be able to articulate these differences. They define themselves more by questions than by answers, and do not appear particularly interested in answers. However, while they refuse identitary labels on the one hand, they still like to market themselves as ethnic on the other, appropriating the trappings of the labels which effectively serve them best: 'When forced to choose, we say we are Italian. At home we are Italian, at work we are less Italian.' (Esposito 1993a:1)

Although Montesano and his former collaborators claim not to speak for a generation, they are still restlessly vocal. They want some kind of identity, yet they apparently reject such cultural signposts as language – they write in English – and behaviour, with one of their aims being to act 'less Italian' (Montesano 1993:22) in their workplace. They do not want to be Canadian either. Protected from the anxieties of the second wave of Italian immigrants, the current generation of transnational migrants from Italy rose in affluence, and, as noted earlier, the status accorded to them is largely separate from ethnic and national concerns.

In this context, publications such as *Eyetalian* run the risk of being seen as reactionary in so far as they attempt to create a venue for self-assessment rather than communal association. Yet their cultural displacement also seems to resonate with a feeling of isolation that they share with their predecessors as members of an immigrant

community, and it is above all the sense of professionalism in the global context that seems to be the driving force behind much current cultural work:

> Our mandate [in creating *Eyetalian*] was to reorganize independent professionals like us, there really wasn't a framework to get together down the lines of what we had in common, which was our Italian background. One of the reasons for this was the initiative was not considered fruitful on its own. There's a struggle as many of the old Italian Canadians are dying out, and we need to embrace wider themes. (Montesano 1993:23)

Even so, *Eyetalian* has been an important vehicle of cultural emergence for contemporary Italian Canadians, creating more options for them to engage in a community-specific environment without going 'all the way', and thereby departing from the tenets of previous cultural projects.

> Not that the magazine's reception has always been welcome, as noted by its editors:

> Canadians see us [the magazine] as cute, and ethnics as cute, there was an article published in the *Globe and Mail* about us, and if you read in between the lines, it was really upsetting what they wrote about us. The magazine industry is so disgustingly anglo; there was this one quote from Doug Bennett, of Mast Head Magazine, he said 'these ethnic magazines, unless they have a sugar daddy, they usually don't last'. That is so indicative of how much condescension there is about how magazines like ours are viewed. A magazine like *Saturday Night* is funded by Conrad Black, but he's not a sugar daddy, he's a business man. If someone gives us money they're a sugar daddy, because obviously they can't be a business person, why would they give us money, we're just an ethnic magazine. There is condescension about what we're trying to do. (Esposito 1993a:1)

The need to organise around 'being Italian Canadian', regardless of what that means, bespeaks the anxiety over being part of a transnational community which seems to search not for *identity*, but rather *recognition* that should be accorded in spite of cultural labels:

> If you don't do the following things, which in a way are stereotypical, you're not really Italian; and all of us don't come from that experience, all of us were born in Italy, raised in Italy, but we live in Canada now, and most of us have lived in other countries before Canada. We definitely have certain attitudes because of our Italian upbringing, but this alone doesn't define who we are. Our identity transcends national borders. (Esposito 1983a:1)

'Hybridity' seems a useful (if also overused) term in this context. It is the term most widely used to describe cultural practices developing in the 'contact zones' (Burke

2004:72), e.g. on the borders between nation-states. Over the last fifteen years, 'hybridity' has evolved into a comfort word for those who 'are repeatedly facing multiple subjectivities as migrant populations' (Burke 2004:72); it has become paradoxically unifying and holistic, suggesting 'a more neutral zone of identity' than before (Burke 2004:53).

A quick glance at the recent history of hybridity reveals this evolution. Considered nebulous, abstract, and enigmatic, early theories of hybridity portrayed it as 'too deeply embedded in a discourse that presupposes an evolutionary hierarchy, and [as carrying] the prior purity of biologism' (Burke 2009:54; Young 1995:7-18). More recent theories no longer consider hybridity solely or even primarily as a marker of difference. Mikhail Bakhtin, who made hybridity theory the subject of his research, focuses on hybridity as an 'encounter, the mixture of languages within a text' (Bakhtin in Young 1995:19). For Bakhtin, when speakers from different life worlds are oriented towards the same symbolic referents within a single social system, they also intersect, that is, they take on elements of identity from one another while becoming themselves, 'regardless of whether they support or contradict one another they must 'come into inner contact' (Bakhtin in Young 1995:89).

Hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Bhabha, who associates the term with ambivalence, but also stresses the interdependence and the mutual construction of hybrid subjectivities (1994:36). Bhabha argues that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a zone he calls the 'Third Space of enunciation' (1994:37) where '[h]ybridity emphasises incommensurable elements […] as the basis of cultural identifications' (1994:219).

For Bhabha, cultural identity always emerges from the indefinite, as a site where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity' (1994:36). This is why he considers the concept of 'hierarchical purity' and the 'exoticism of cultural

diversity' to be irrelevant, favouring instead an empowering hybridity within which cultural displacement may eventually open 'the way to conceptualizing a transnational culture' (Bhabha 1994:38). To Bhabha, it is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and significance of culture where 'meanings are continuously negotiated' (Bhabha 1994:37).

Many of the present-day theorists who find the term hybridity most useful[9] are Indian and black cultural commentators writing in the postmodern world of late capitalism, whose history differs significantly from that of European migrants (Young 1995:2-26). Yet the term is still useful to this study in so far as it opens outward, making a plethora of juxtapositions and new configurations possible, and thereby emphasising cultural heterogeneity as an important quality in a contemporary reality when two, three, or even four cultures are unevenly combined.

V

As previously argued, Italian Canadian theatre practitioners have historically written, and often produced, plays that either question or celebrate notions of cultural identity, gender, political credibility, and historical authority. Mary Melfi, Claudio Cinelli, and Carlo Chiarilli, the three playwrights to be analysed in this third and final chapter of my thesis, do not depart from such common themes. Yet the changes brought about by revamped multicultural and immigration policies, with their increasing focus on globalisation and transnational practices, have influenced the ways in which playwrights approach these themes theatrically. In fact, while they all call themselves 'Italian Canadians', Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli are nothing like their predecessors: the majority of them are theatre practitioners who travel back and forth between Italy and

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[9] Hybridity has also been subject to critique as part of a general dissatisfaction with colonial discourse theory, e.g. by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984); Benita Parry (1987); and Aijaz Ahmad (1995). These critics all stress the textualist and idealist basis of such analysis and point to the fact that they neglect specific local differences.

Canada, sitting comfortably between the two nations without residing permanently in either country. They may still feel profoundly Italian and/or Canadian; yet they are also acutely aware of the artificiality and the permeability of cultural markers and boundaries, as the interviews I include in this chapter will show. One argument I will be making is that, within the context of transnational practices which have emerged in Canada the last fifteen years, notably in Toronto and Montreal, Italian Canadian theatre merits the label 'transcultural' insofar as this latter term has more latitude to explore and critique alternative forms of citizenship and cultural identity across and beyond national boundaries, although the subjectivities it produces are by no means free of the mediation and interference of the state.

'Transculturalism' is generally deployed as a term that refers to a mixing or exchange of values which 'transcends particular cultures on behalf of a universality of the human condition' (Pavis 1996:6,8). While it acknowledges differences in politics, gender, and nations, transculturalism also aims to grasp what individuals have in common (Ortiz 1995). On the universal level, it can be understood in terms of an integral process of identity formation (Schulze-Engler and Helff 2009:x); questions of 'who I am' and 'what I am' are grounded in the universal ethical question of 'how should I act' (Welsch 1999). These 'universalising' cultural practices, which run the gamut of cultural modes and genres, seem to combine in ways appropriate for the global market (Schulze-Engler and Helff 2009:xi).

In more theatrical terms, one only has to refer to French theorist Patrice Pavis's voluminous tome *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (1996) to appreciate the wide range of approaches encompassed by the term 'transculturalism', and the extent to which it evades any neat definition. Pavis's study of a range of transcultural practices, and of the theoretical discussions they have generated, suggests that the field aims to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal human

condition; directors engaged in transcultural theatre are also interested in particularities and traditions only in so far as they enable the directors to identify aspects of commonality rather than difference (Pavis 1996:6).

According to Pavis, there are many variations to this search for the universal. He himself considers *interculturalism* more 'appropriate to the task of grasping the dialectic of exchanges of civilities between cultures' than 'multiculturalism' (2). He also differentiates it from 'intra-culturalism,' which 'refers to the traditions of a single nation, and which are often almost forgotten or deformed,' and from 'transculturalism,' which 'transcends particular cultures and looks for a universal human condition' (20).

Pavis stresses that these principles are analogous to one another rather than homologous; nevertheless, his search for an essence beyond socialisation is characteristic of the desire to transcend social and cultural 'trappings' in a move toward a 'purer' mode of communication and theatrical presence. More specifically, and in relation to his own work, Pavis points to internal diversity within the boundaries of a particular region or nation. This sense of the transcultural has similarities to the multicultural I explored in the second chapter of my thesis, in so far as it assumes either the interaction or the coexistence of regional and local cultures within the larger framework of the nation-state. However, while the 'multi' upholds a notion of cohesiveness, the 'trans' prioritises the transition and translation of diverse cultures (Pavis 1996:9).

In the years since Patrice Pavis put forth his much-circulated 'hourglass' model of intercultural transfer (1992), i.e. the notion that cultural transfers move in one direction from a 'source' to a 'target' culture, it has been challenged, revised, and rendered more culturally complex. Christopher Balme (1999) first deepened the field with his thoughtful and comprehensive model of syncretism in performance, drawing examples from New Zealand and Pacific Islander bicultural contexts, while, more

recently, Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) has put forth the idea of 'the interweaving of cultures' in relation to a transcultural performance, hence dismissing the hourglass model completely.

However, work around transculturalism and theatre has long been associated with Peter Brook (1972), Richard Schechner (1996, 2013), Eugenio Barba (1991), and Arjun Appadurai (1991), among several others. According to Schechner (1996, 1997) and Brook (1972), both anthropologists by training, transculturalism is synonymous with 'transcendence of the particular', (Brook 1972:43) which is a necessary part of the mythic quest for origins and Western theatre's supposed loss of 'purity.'(44) This return to sources and the reappropriation of primitive languages involves a metaphysical quest for a truth that holds everywhere and at any time, irrespective of historical or cultural differences. Schechner, in particular, shook up the conventional discourse by reminding practitioners involved in transcultural performances that '[i]ndividual artists, on all sides of this question, steal,' inasmuch as '[t]hat is what [all] artists do.' (1996:23)

Barba (1991) and Appadurai (1991) do not dissent from the positions of Schechner and Brook. However, their reflections on 'transcendence' are phrased and interpreted as a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility – economic, technological, sociocultural, geopolitical. Appadurai, especially, observes that a transcultural performance does not move out and through the world via a system of binaries, but rather through global cultural flows which cannot be pinned down any more than hybridity itself:

> If we understand transcultural performance as transcendence, we must see that it is work that is incorporated into a system of cultural production of universal value. In this aspect, that is, in its role in a global system of cultural production, a performance can be seen as a constitutive part of the world-system. Its manifestations are the consequences of—as well as bear consequences for—social, political, and economic values beyond the nation-state. (1991:208)

Concurrently, other critics such as Lo and Gilbert (2003) have mapped out more expansive and flexible models for a 'cross-cultural theatre praxis.' In 'Towards a

Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,' Lo and Gilbert consider Pavis's approach towards a 'Western vision of exchange' as biased (33). Yet while the two critics advance a more complex topography that engages more fully with multicultural practices,[10] they too discuss 'transcultural theatre' as a subset of 'intercultural theatre', 'a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions'. (36)

In the Canadian context, it is the theatre critic Ric Knowles who has done most to posit transculturalism as a positive, if still tenuous, possibility – the 'potential negotiation, exchange and forging of new and hybrid subjectivities,' keeping 'the focus on the spaces between cultures,' broadly defined as 'sites' (2009:3). The process is 'dialogic' rather than appropriative, as in Pavis; the representation of a cultural 'others' is articulated in response, but not necessarily in opposition, to a cultural 'self.' Knowles also distinguishes 'transculturalism' from 'multiculturalism,' 'with its links to government policy and its tendency to ghettoize' (3);[11] and from 'cross-culturalism' – which Lo and Gilbert fail to define altogether although the title of their work would

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[10] See *Act II*, p. 117.

[11] In Canada, with some exception in Quebec (see below, p. 210; also, see *Act II*, p. 138), discussion around transculturalism has largely been subordinated to that privileging assimilation or multicultural frameworks, both of which have presupposed a model of immigrant containment and practices within national borders (Biles et al. 2008; Winland 1998). Yet transculturalism affects how migrants become incorporated in Canada in specific ways that need to be identified more clearly. Studies carried out so far suggest several broad patterns through which transculturalism and multiculturalism, acting together, help immigrants to find a cultural home in Canada. However, as Kamboureli notes, Canada's official policy of multiculturalism is flawed because 'it recognizes a subject's ethnic difference only insofar as that subject identifies herself with a given, coherently structured, community' (1996:112). Even so, transculturalism and multiculturalism are productively related in three ways at least. Transculturalism has proven to be such a vibrant force in Canada that the kind of society that emerges from it spills out over the edges of the normative model constituted by official multiculturalism. Transnational migrants are involved in dual national allegiances and complex identities and senses of belonging involving more than one nation or ethnic affiliation. This contrasts with the official notion of multiculturalism as a Canada-centred process in which what was happening in the wider world was (until recently) left out of policies and research on integration. For example, Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong (2006) observe that 'transnational practices […] suggest a sense of belonging […] that extends beyond Canadian borders posing a challenge to the present form of multicultural policy' (1), while James Frideres (in Biles et al. 2008:83–6) notes the challenge transculturalism poses for understanding how transnational migrants incorporate into existing ethnic communities.

suggest otherwise – 'with its suggestion of an interchange limited to two groups, usually the dominant culture and the 'other community' (3).

The latest addition to the debate around transcultural theatre comes from Josette Feral (2009), who questions whether transculturalism (like interculturalism) is a form of homogenising globalisation that 'threatens the diversity of cultures and tends to level everything by reducing the different to the identical' (8): 'Any practice that borrows, translates, or adapts elements of other cultures, without contextualizing them, inevitably contributes to the homogenization of current practices and cultures as well as to the loss of elements that distinguish them' (8). Feral concludes that 'it is both appropriate and desirable to nuance and articulate differences among societies' (12). For Feral, transculturalism is not a benign cultural blending but an educative political strategy: 'these acts must stress crossings and disjunctions, allowing each culture to learn from the other without pillaging or enslavement' (12). Here, the enactment of the 'other' becomes a means of articulating difference and of asserting the veracity of the other *as* self.

Whether the theatre stages of Canada enact the definition of transcultural practices that can 'produce an emerging, multiplicitous and hybrid range of ways of being' (Knowles 2009:5), as Knowles hopes, or whether they can make a political statement, as Feral wishes, depends entirely of course on theatre company mandates and the predilections of theatre practitioners themselves. It is my belief, however, that if the transcultural sphere delineated above is to emerge more fully, it will necessarily have to draw on the resources provided by hybridity, to what Hannerz has referred as 'the global ecumene' (2002:7). 'Global ecumene' is a concept that Hannerz uses to put hybridity in opposition to the idea of 'cultures' as 'territorially fixed, discrete entities' (7); like hybridity, the 'global ecumene' focuses on 'the interconnectedness of the world, by way of interactions, exchanges and related developments, affecting not least identity and the organization of culture' (2003:223).

Over the last twenty years, the artistic scene in Montreal seems indeed to have embraced a form of global ecumene, with Quebec and its cultural productions enjoying success across the world. Le Cirque du Soleil has become a global phenomenon and even has an entry in dictionaries; Denys Arcand's films have seduced the Cannes Festival; Robert Lepage's stage plays have become a synonym for international success; and Céline Dion (for better or for worse) is still a resounding global success story. Far from endangering the development of Quebec culture, globalisation has in fact contributed to a new feeling of confidence in Quebec and in the cultural and economic capital it holds.

This is not a reason for saying that French and, more pertinently, Quebec culture are no longer the defining characteristics of a Québécois. Yet debates around the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society are now taking an entirely different shape. Whereas these debates used to focus on Quebec's exclusive character, this exclusivity seems no longer to be a prerequisite for the younger generations, as the Parti Québécois itself witnessed in 2005 when its platform promised that the party would hold a referendum on sovereignty as soon as it was elected: the referendum question would be absolutely clear, and would not contain the idea of a Quebec-Canada partnership. A referendum victory, of whatever size, would have led to a unilateral declaration of independence. Two years later, however, weakened as a result of a third-place finish in the 2007 election – its worst performance since 1980 (Lester and Philpot 2005) – the Parti Québécois changed its mind.

On a more general level, the main difference to be observed today in most western regions including Quebec is that the public sphere competes on an equal footing with various secular discourses (e.g. feminism, environmentalism, humanism, religious rhetoric) in an open struggle for social and political legitimacy. As a result, separatism has largely lost the prominent role it once played in the ideological making of the nation

(Dobbelaere 1999; Dickinson and Young 2003; Henderson 2007). And if Quebec seemingly no longer aspires to be a distinct entity within Canada, at least in secular terms, its cultural projects over the last twenty years reflect this prevailing sentiment by showing that other groups have distinctive characteristics that are regarded as equally valid to the Quebec ones.[12]

This is not to say of course that Toronto has been left out of the equation; the Toronto Theatre District is still Canada's largest, as well as being the third largest English-speaking theatre district in the world after London's West End and New York City's Broadway (Ackerman 2013; Wasserman 2004). Yet New York has been experiencing a financial crisis, with Broadway having become so expensive and risky that few completely new shows ever open there. As a consequence, Broadway is increasingly reliant on international investment, which Toronto, as a cordial neighbour, has seemed only too happy to provide in the last two decades.[13]

Toronto's increased partnership with New York has caused its centre of theatrical gravity to shift. Not just Toronto's: regional theatres in the US and English-speaking Canada have also gained in stature, while joint theatre productions between Canada and the US are blossoming, even as the prestige of Broadway – especially for non-musicals – has shrunk. However, this has also meant that transcultural playwrights from Europe heading to Toronto, more often than not, work along the Toronto–New

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[12] Secularisation is presently causing heated arguments in Quebec. Since Pauline Marois won Quebec's general election on 4th September 2012, she has split the Québécois population with her intention to enshrine 'secularism' in provincial legislation, 'managing to alienate even fellow nationalists' (12 November 2013). In particular, raging debates around the Islamic veil, which Quebec civil servants would no longer be authorised to wear in the workplace under the province's proposed new secular charter, are currently dominating the socio-political scene of the province and beyond. For more on this, see Christine Fauré's *Political and Historical Encyclopaedia of Women* (2013); Cousineau (10 September 2013); Woods (20 August 2013).
[13] To be sure New York suffered the World Trade Center attack, which had knock-on effects for many sectors, while Toronto was spared. Toronto still had its own calamity in 2002, when it was struck by a SARS epidemic that provoked the UN's health body to warn people to stay away. In the shadow of this, much-touted theatre productions were forced to close early (Flavelle, 17 June 2011).

York corridor, while partnership with Europe – if it happens at all – occupies a peripheral place.

It is important to understand that this has little to do with the process of Americanisation to which Toronto has always felt more exposed, even more threatened at times, than Montreal.[14] To think in such polarised terms would distort insight into the characteristics of globalisation over the last few decades. What is found now in Toronto, as in Montreal, is almost invariably a negotiating process rather than one of complete acceptance of or resistance to the US. In the words of Carlo Chiarilli, one of the key theatre practitioners in this chapter: 'if you can attract discerning visitors, market size is almost irrelevant.' (20 July 2011)

Still, the fact that two out of the three playwrights analysed in this chapter reside in Montreal requires further consideration. In fact, as noted earlier, while Toronto and Montreal, at least on an economic level, seem to have attracted the same share of transnational migrants from Europe over the last twenty years, theatre-wise it is Montreal that has emerged as the favourite spot for transcultural productions by transnational playwrights from Europe. It has already been discussed how transcultural debates originated in Quebec, from the Italian Canadian community itself, as early as in the 1980s.[15] Such debates resonated with theatre practitioners, within and outside

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[14] For more on the Canada-US border, see Diana Brydon's 'Postcolonialism Now' (2004), *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 73 (2), pp. 671-706; Milena Marinkova's 'Canadian literature of "here" and "elsewhere"' (2013), *BJCS*, 26 (2), pp/ 253-73; David Stirrup and Gillian Roberts's article (2010), 'Introduction to the ARCS Special Issue on Culture and the Canada-US Border,' *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 40 (3), pp. 321-5.; The Leverhulme Trust's funded project *Culture and the Canada-US Border* (CCUSB), and its regularly update blog: http://ccusb.wordpress.com/ (2013). For a historical overview of the Toronto-US relationship, and of when the spillover hypothesis was first introduced, see Ernst B. Haas's *Beyond the Nation State: Functionalism and International Organization* (1964). Lauren McKinsey and Viktor Konrad were the first scholars to apply the idea to the Canada-U.S. border in their seminal work *Borderlands Reflections: The United States and Canada (1989)*. See also 'note 21' in the *Introduction* to this thesis.

[15] See *Act II,* pp. 121, 138.

Quebec, largely thanks to Micone, whose work has been instrumental to the emergence of transcultural theatre both in Quebec and elsewhere.[16]

Probably the decisive motor in this change was the 1993 transformation of the annual Quebec Drama Festival into the Quebec Drama Federation (QDF), a lively professional association offering workshops, lobbying governments, and promoting and providing leadership to a membership of about 250 individuals and 60 professional and community companies, many of them founded jointly by transnational migrants from Europe and theatre-training institutions across Canada. Through this Montreal-based association, Anglo-Franco collaboration has since become a winning business strategy for the whole of Canada, which would have been unthinkable only 25 years ago (Ackerman 2013).

For the past nine years, QDF has published a triennial calendar in both paper and on-line versions, which features a complete production schedule, play notes, and visuals. The autumn 2010 calendar was launched with a standing-room-only event held at Main Line Theatre on Boulevard St-Laurent, featuring excerpts from forthcoming productions. Located above a grocery, Main Line is also headquarters for the Montreal Fringe Festival, founded in 1991 by two McGill students, who established it as a major street event with attendance reaching 55,000 (Ackerman 2013).

The Main Line space is one of the many buildings in the centre of Montreal which have been converted into theatres, contributing to the gentrification of the Boulevard St-Laurent immigrant corridor brought about by transnational migrants. Like Main Line, other companies have become associated with this space, among them the Italian Canadian Compagnia delle Porte Girevoli, which takes its cue from the fringe spirit: have space/must perform. Most energetic young companies on the scene, from all over Canada as well as from abroad, have a precise remit: to devise and apply

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[16] See *Act II*, p. 138.

performance to diverse locations and audiences reflecting contemporary unease with fixed inscriptions of both place and identity. Recognising that it is possible to have emotional attachments and affiliations to more than one place at once, Montreal has been attracting contemporary devisers from all over the globe who seek to develop performative practices that invite audiences to re-envision and re-imagine familiar places while recognising the multiplicity of meanings they carry. Methodologically, this means that companies and performers often work with a dynamic performance site, and that investigating this site's layered meanings is part of the process of the transcultural productions themselves.

VI

A sustained discussion of the rapidly blurring edges of cultures and their structural interdependence in a globalised world can be found in a wide variety of recent work by the Italian Canadian playwrights I discuss in this chapter, Mary Melfi, Claudio Cinelli, and Carlo Chiarilli. Each of them has responded with their own particular methods and objectives, and all of them are at different points in their careers, which are invariably shaped by their individual experiences with migration. While reflecting the vitality and diversity of today's predominantly transcultural theatre scene, these three playwrights write ninety percent of their works in English, self-translating their own plays if touring outside Canada or investing in translation technologies for their audiences if necessary. In Montreal, this means that the English language is no longer seen as a symbol of colonial oppression by most, but rather as an indispensable tool in the daily working lives of the Québécois.

For the playwrights in this chapter, English is also a language interspersed with Italian words, but these words are, more often than not, what the linguists would call 'cultural markers', i.e. 'words, phrases, or segments which are transferred and/or

reproduced from the source culture and/or target culture text, without modifications'
(Gikandi 1996:181).

It might seem logical that these playwrights find their cultural referents from within English-speaking Canada, even if they do not operate from within its institutions. However, their work does not address issues which are exclusively relevant to either Anglo-Canadian or Italian Canadian audiences. Rather, as they themselves are part of that influx of transnational intellectuals who have entered Canada over the last twenty years, their strong transnational ties make their work particularly relevant to the global ecumene. The trajectory of Mary Melfi's playwriting history, for instance, moves from an examination of the local Italian Canadian community in Toronto where she grew up to a critical investigation of more global issues, reaching beyond the borders of an ethnic group hitherto preoccupied with definitions of self and other in national terms. Claudio Cinelli, for his part, grew up in Montreal's 'Little Italy', but, like Melfi before him, he has travelled extensively across Europe and the US and is influenced equally by Italian Canadian community-based theatre, mainstream European, North-American, and Quebec theatre. As a result, his work, though certainly informed by the area where he was raised, is more accessible to wider theatre audiences. The last of the playwrights to be considered in this chapter, Carlo Chiarilli, in referring to himself as simply 'an Italian who happens to live in Toronto' (20 July 2011), sees himself as keeping a foot in each country. This allows him to create stories and characters that articulate present-day Italian Canadian theatre practices. All three playwrights are in 'constant motion' (Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli, 20-28 July 2011), which enables them to extend the terms of reference of 'Italian Canadian' to encapsulate Italian migrants, and to forge unique transcultural practices through the theatre medium.

Even though these playwrights are unique and their activities include wide variations in behaviour and outcomes, they are also significant as a group because they

offer a specific paradigm for Italian Canadian transcultural theatre, with each occupying a 'third space of enunciation' (Bhabha 1994:37) in which their identities are continuously 'negotiated and translated' (Bhabha 1994:37). By fusing multiple theatre traditions, each generates an eclectic brand of hybrid performances that addresses issues relevant to the immediate migrant community and beyond. As will be seen, these types of performances have proven to be a particularly effective method of responding to the processes of globalisation, though this does not come without compromise or sacrifice.

Mary Melfi (1951-)

Mary Melfi was born in 1951, the youngest of five children, in the outskirts of Rome. She was only six when her father, who owned a corner shop that served as the centre of activity in the area, died suddenly, leaving behind a large family in stricken post-war Italy. This is when Melfi's mother decided to head to Canada with her children, joining the second wave of Italian immigrants in search of better economic opportunities. Melfi was 10 when she arrived in Toronto. She taught herself English by composing poetry, which still occupies a key role in her writing career. It was through the medium of the theatre, however, and more specifically by attending drama classes at the Piccolo Teatro di Toronto,[17] that Melfi managed to ease the language barrier further. This also meant that the Italian Canadian community in which she grew up has been integral to her formative years, providing her with a sort of cultural grounding.

As early as 1969, Melfi began creating experimental pieces that addressed, along with others among Mesaglio's students, Italian Canadian immigrant lives in the Toronto area.[18] In an interview, Melfi explained to me how she grew to love theatre:

> When I was a young woman I preferred reading plays to novels. I couldn't afford to go to the theatre back then but I certainly enjoyed borrowing plays from my local library. When I was at university, Mesaglio encouraged my love of theatre and even helped me produce a short play I wrote, which later would

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[17] See *Act I*, pp. 100-8.
[18] See *Act I*, pp. 102-8.

form the nucleus of my two New York plays. That cemented my commitment to drama. I actually expected to be a playwright back then, I never dreamed I would be mainly a poet or novelist, but 'reality' set in. (27 July 2011)

Mesaglio's theatre also helped Melfi see 'the similarities in cultures rather than the differences' (27 July 2011), and encouraged her to travel internationally to experience the lives of other ethnic groups outside Canada. Ironically, Melfi clarified to me that it was only upon her arrival in New York in 1974, aged twenty-three, that she began to question her identity and its relevance beyond her own culture and community. Her work remained predominantly autobiographical at that time, relating to her own personal journey as an immigrant to Canada. This is reflected in her first two full-length plays, *Foreplay* and *My Italian Wife*, which she wrote in 1976 and 1978 respectively, but which were only published, without having being staged, in 2008.

Foreplay opens with a discussion of personal relationships. An emotionally insecure couple, Adam and Bianca, take a much-needed vacation on an island in order to improve their marital lives. Bianca, as the lead Italian Canadian character in the play, provides the most iconic lines, with Melfi effectively combining Bianca's isolation as an Italian Canadian woman in the late 1970s, and her existential crisis: on two occasions, she fails to bring her pregnancy to term. Bianca is seen as living in a cultural and existential limbo: on the one hand, as a businesswoman, she tries to imitate the bourgeois English Canadian childless feminist and career women of the 1970s; but on the other, as an Italian Canadian woman, she seems attracted to the model of the traditional maternal woman embodied by her Italian mother. Each of Bianca's miscarriages is minutely described, as are their psychological repercussions on the lives of both her and Adam. This is when *Foreplay* introduces the character of the therapist, who is also at the centre of Melfi's latest play to date, *Sex Therapy* (1996). The therapist is crucial to the resolution of both plays, acting as a sort of 'love element' who mends relationships, private and public alike.

Melfi's later play *My Italian Wife* is a pointed, but still humorous, autobiographical tale that the editors of Guernica have described as a 'non-linear expression of our non-linear life' (2008).[19] The play is Melfi's most ambitious attempt to put a voice to her fractured identity in theatre terms. A black comedy in three acts, *My Italian Wife* revolves around a series of textual and physical juxtapositions and cultural layerings, which comprise an underlying sense of terror linked to the liminality of the characters. These three components intentionally work against each other throughout the piece like disjointed appendages, mirroring Melfi's own struggle with cultural fragmentation as an Italian Canadian in the 1970s.

It is not by chance that the main characters in the play are two Italian Canadian women. Rita, an English Literature teacher, has had to change her name as Rita did not seem to inspire much confidence in the classroom, and yet her students still keep referring to her as 'Miss Romano, the Italian teacher' (p. 89). Rita's younger sister, Paula, a divorcée, seems the more liberated woman of the two; with her successful career as a businesswoman, she keeps her connections with Italy alive by travelling to Rome for work as much as she can (p. 98). Both Rita and Paula are regarded as highly accomplished women by the other characters, even Rita's cynical husband, John; and both function beyond their household, nothing like a 'woman from the past' (p. 130). Yet both of them still struggle to do their jobs properly and to make their private lives work.

Far from advocating women's place within the Italian Canadian community, Melfi's early plays question the very notion of both 'Italian Canadian' and 'community', and their respective meanings to the protagonists. Bianca's angst derives

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[19] The back cover mistakenly describes the play as dealing with two sisters, 'one Italian-born [Rita], the other Canadian-born [Paula]' (2008). Actually, both sisters were born in Italy (*MIW*, p. 83): one of the many inaccuracies a scholar of Italian Canadian theatre has to confront.

from her inability to feel fully integrated into Canadian culture and from her biological difficulties in acquiring the role of the traditional Italian mother. Both Rita and Paula are described as being suspended, e.g. via the metaphor of a ship full of immigrants: in spite of living in Canada, their life feels as if they still were on that ship, adrift 'in international waters' (p. 108). While ethnicity and feminism can be regarded as two important factors in *Foreplay* and *My Italian Wife*, I would argue that the two plays pave the way for Melfi's definitive theatre work so far, *Sex Therapy* (1996), where her main concern is the life of the individual as a citizen of the world. Ordinary lives are dialectically balanced for Melfi, individually oriented yet still trapped, directly or indirectly, in gender, social, and historical force fields. At the same time, a wider terror permeates her work, as suggested by the seeming inability of her protagonists to overcome their pasts.

Melfi spent four years of her life in New York, where she completed her PhD with a thesis on Margaret Atwood's poetry. Having taught English literature for two years at a New York college, she decided to move to Argentina, and then travelled back to her city of birth, where she taught Canadian literature for four years. In 1993, at the age of forty-two, she flew to Montreal, where she still resides, and where she has published a dozen-odd books of poetry and prose in the last 20 years. She still flies regularly in and out of Canada to promote her books[20] and is an active foreign correspondent for the *Eyetalian Magazine*.

Melfi's recent work, including theatre, reflects her variegated accomplishments and life experiences as a migrant intellectual. Having entered adulthood in the early 1970s, having moved to the US during the Cold War, and having read Fanon, Arendt, and Sartre, Melfi has indirectly absorbed contemporaneous

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[20] An up-todate list of Melfi's prose work can be found on Pivato's online platform (1996) and on Melfi's e-fanzine, *Italy Revisited* (2013).

anxieties over the possibilities of a Third World War, and her work includes an analysis of the FLQ and the Italian Red Brigades among other separatist terrorist groups. Hence the distinct atmosphere of terror in her work, which leaches into the psyches of ordinary citizens and ordinary lives. This is not to say that Melfi's dramaturgy is exclusively concerned with troubled characters caught in volatile global contexts; for her work still largely starts from local situations, even if her experiences as a transnational migrant have gradually worked their way into her plays.

Before taking a closer look at *Sex Therapy*, I should explain that Melfi's theatre remains largely literary in origin and, as such, develops from quite a unique methodology. Certainly, her literary-based education and formative work as a poet and novelist separate her from the other two playwrights in this chapter, who are also a decade younger and whose work is more conspicuously performance-oriented. In my interview with Melfi, she explained that she was taking a break from performing her plays because she did not have the money to take them anywhere (27 July 2011). *Foreplay* and *My Italian Wife*, more to the point, were ineligible for funding through the multicultural programme in Canada since she was a US resident while she was writing them. Admittedly, a first version of *Sex Therapy* was staged in 1994 at Concordia University, but this was part of the in-course assessment for the university's theatre degree. What Melfi was eventually offered turned out, however, to be a much better option:

> Lucky for me, Antonio D'Alfonso, through Guernica Editions, supported my literary endeavors and agreed to publish all the plays I wrote. It's unusual for a playwright, even a well-established one, to have one's plays published, even more when they have never been staged so I feel quite blessed. (27 July 2011)

Sex Therapy (1996)

Sex Therapy is an ambitious play, 'absurdist in style and political in content' (27 July 2011), in which eight characters from a variety of worlds within Melfi's reckoning – the city, the street, the university, the theatre – are brought together, both before and after the fact, by the theft of a Roman doll. Set in an unspecified but eerily familiar time, in which everyone is at 'war with one another' (*ST*, pp. 13, 27), the play takes place in a room at the imaginary Vita Institute, where Dr Nicolas, a group therapist, meets his five patients on a weekly basis.

Melfi makes it clear from the start, in her production notes, that everything has to be 'ultra-modern' (*ST*, p. 6) with the exception of the 'antique' doll (*ST*, p. 7), and that any external references to place 'should reflect the fashion of the year the play is being produced in, rather than its date of publication' (*ST*, pp. 7-8). *Sex Therapy* seems to echo Micone's *Déjà l'agonie* by questioning a constant feature of Italian Canadian theatre since Venier and Mesaglio, i.e. that its various communities are place-bound, while also acknowledging the significance and creative opportunities presented by refusing to anchor the play to a specific place. Undoubtedly, the emphasis on localism in Italian Canadian community-based theatre has done much to nurture its communities and to challenge their Italian and Canadian dual referents; however, *Sex Therapy* also reinforces my general perception that Italian Canadian theatre has become increasingly concerned with the combination of the local with the global.

Similarly, the play does not explicitly rest on the shoulders of an Italian Canadian family, and it shies away from issues of community self-representation. In this sense, Melfi seems to hedge her bets with her reviewers by commenting that there are no characters in the play who might be seen as 'openly representing members of the Italian Canadian community'. Melfi's immediate concern over ethnicity – or the lack of it – is justified, as she herself explained to me in our interview:

There are many possible readings of *Sex Therapy*. Some reviewers have suggested that it is about psychology, feminism or social conflict. To me the key to understanding the play lies elsewhere. The idea came to me during the summer of 1990, in the midst of the Oka Crisis, the confrontation between Natives and the Quebec government. I felt quite disturbed by the government's reaction to the Native people's protest. Moreover, seeing that many Québécois reacted to the English-speaking Mohawks by pelting them with stones, as they drove away to safety, made me feel personally attacked and led me to ask myself if there is really room in today's Quebec for 'others'. (27 July 2011)

While my analysis of *Sex Therapy* will not go as far as to suggest that the 'therapy' in the title is an attempt at soothing Melfi's own identity anxieties, my interpretation of the play is geared towards her critical stance on ethnopolitics. This element of social criticism, presented in the first act, constitutes an important aspect of *Sex Therapy*. The play vaguely mentions riots (*ST*, scene II, III, pp. 17, 23), and all the characters share a feeling of acute discomfort:

DR NICOLAS: Each of you has a different problem, but you all share this incredible sense of outrage. Things are not the way they should be. (*ST*, scene II, p. 19)

Melfi's reaction to ethnocentrism and prejudice, which she perceives in nationalist terms, is explored through the metaphor of group therapy. Like her theatrical predecessors, she remembers that the essence of theatre is tension; accordingly, she structures *Sex Therapy* around a series of conflicts. The title of the play is borrowed from the line of one of the characters who erroneously thinks she has joined a sex therapy group when, in fact, their room is 'reserved for complicated mind games […] Mind fucking' (*ST*, scene I, p. 14), which I believe could be the perfect tagline for the play.

That the most powerful moments of the play are brought into relief by the clashing of world views and the intricate dynamics at play in the therapy room is undoubted; within this grotesque topography, drama derives from the day-to-day reality of a diverse group of patients who have come together to discuss their lives. Yet the issue at stake does not revolve around the characters and what they represent as

individuals; rather, there appears to be a communal battle going on between past and present, the outcome of which will inevitably affect the future:

> MAX:
> We, the people, accept that justice is injustice when it suits the ruling class.
> MARGO:
> I request permission to appeal my case to the Supreme Court.
> CECILE:
> Haven't you heard? The Supreme Court has closed long before we were born. The Court of Chance alone determines the outcome of life these days.
> CHARLOTTE:
> In the future, only the perfect will be allowed to have jobs, partners. Competition is brutally fierce. (*ST*, scene VI, p. 40)

In this Hobbesian world, justice is dominated by fate and by an unquestionable 'ruling class;' reality is a war of all against all with no sign of resistance or memory of an ethical alternative. This is further emphasised by the play's constant references to the Roman Empire. These provide Melfi with a vision of merciless violence, not unlike the pelting of the English-speaking Mohawks to which she referred in our interview, which fuelled ethnic violence. The Romans are described as a ruthless tribe, believing in the power of horoscopes (*ST*, scene XII, p. 98) to classify individuals according to race (*ST*, scene IX, p. 57). And while the violent past is put into direct conversation with the equally violent present, Roman treasures and artefacts are ironically preserved in a 'Museum of Decivilisation' (*ST*, scene XII, p. 77). The irony immediately calls to mind Walter Benjamin's aphorisms on the barbarity of civilisation (1999); while a further Benjaminian reference is the profession of one of the protagonists, Margo, a collector (Benjamin 1999:3,5).

Benjamin's historical materialism, with its refusal of any view of the present as a mere development of the past, is especially helpful as it appears to offer an archaeology of the moment (1999:2-3, 205). The Romans were brutes, and so is the 'ultra-modern' world where the characters currently live as it did not evolve from its

Roman past. In this sense, the play seems to lack a sense of nostalgia, and it is just as far from regarding the myth of home as a primal space of return. Unlike the previous Italian Canadian plays in this thesis, *Sex Therapy* does not seem to engage, even remotely, with the idealisation of the past, or with the reconstruction of an imagined homeland.

During my interview, I couldn't help but ask Melfi if she had ever idealised any culture or country, to which she replied:

> To me idealising a country automatically makes one sees it as being superior to others. I don't believe there are superior countries or that people are superior because they live in such and such a place. I have lost my allegiance to Italy and Quebec even if I prefer Italian literature and films to French or German literature and films. My past and my roots are in Rome, but the link won't force me to dwell in that place forever. (27 July 2011)

While Melfi's frequent references to the past in *Sex Therapy* can be seen as an expression of 'the desire of the present subject for self-understanding as well as for an understanding of the historical object-world', this relationship is never represented as an idealised quest, an all-encompassing totality for the play's protagonists. Rather, the search is understood in terms of making archaeological finds to be 'collected' (Benjamin 1999:203). 'Collecting' writes Benjamin, 'is a form of practical memory.' (203), in which the collector brings together links with the past and practices of the present, chronicling the transient, the fleeting, and the contingent (1999:205). There is an understanding of the past as being at the same level as the present.

Yet the search is still risky and often disappointing (Benjamin 1999:207). In this context, the theft of the Roman doll that Margo was carrying with her during one of the weekly sessions is significant in *Sex Therapy*. The entire group engages in a quest for the missing artefact – as if they needed that particular missing piece of a puzzle in order to make sense of their past. However, the doll's eventual discovery is a bathetic moment: it turns out to be a fake (*ST*, scene XIII, p. 117), and that the museum director

had known this 'all along' (*ST*, scene XIII, p. 117). The fake doll seems to be a warning against receiving or invoking ethnic writing as truth; implicitly, Melfi also warns against recommending it as such. In the proudly multicultural context of contemporary Canada, the doll seems to caution against what George Elliott Clarke identifies as the 'panacea politics' (2000:163) practised by some Canadian literary scholars who hope to compensate for a history of racism and to demonstrate their own antiracism by uncritically celebrating ethnic writers – celebrating their 'difference' while failing to engage with either the poetic merits of their texts or with the particular histories they invoke (2000:163).

If, on the one hand, *Sex Therapy* seems to reject the notion that the past marches towards, and therefore justifies, the present, it is worth remembering how the play also appears to suggest that its characters are not too dissimilar to the very Romans from whom the group tries to distance itself. The five characters even go so far as to organise a 'tribunal' (*ST*, scene XII, p. 77), in the fashion of a classical play, demanding that the alleged thief should be killed if found guilty of stealing the Roman doll (*ST*, scene XII, pp. 80-1). When thinking about classical drama – Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Seneca, to name a few – the characters act and feel in tribal terms; when considering the *Oresteia*, *Oedipus*, or *Phaedra*, their organisation is based around an extended family with a father or chief at its head. In Melfi's play, the characters still think and feel in tribal terms; their loyalties are organised around their weekly therapy sessions. Theirs is a virtually all-male society, the men making up the warriors of the tribe, while the women are relegated to the background though they are admired for their cunning (*ST*, scene XII, p. 88). The idea of community as family seems to have been stripped away as, in the therapy room, the activities of a family are no longer appropriate. The approach to the locale becomes increasingly territorial as the play unfolds: the characters crawl on sofas, spill drinks over the furniture, and intimidate their host.

The hostility is not just directed at the room, but more especially at the authority of the doctor himself, Dr Nicolas, as the hitherto head or chief from whom they seem to take both direction and orders (*ST*, scene I, VIII, pp. 11, 50). If, at one level, the therapy sessions are the characters' shelter against an external world that outrages them, they are also a reaction against an ideology which is imposed by that world, the genealogy of which is consistently subject to critique: 'we all descend from the same ancestors, Doctor, a wild, unruly tribe of fighting drunkards, the Romans' (*ST*, scene VII, p. 45). These and similar speeches in the play reveal the extent to which the true conflict for the patients is that between themselves and internalised figures of authority, whom they simultaneously resent and admire, alternately put down and impress.

The group devotes much of its energy in the play to rebelling against authoritative figures from both the present and the past. Implicit in this rebellion is a different kind of disavowal: a rejection of what Melfi calls 'necessary mimesis' (Melfi in Caccia 1998:141), i.e. the expectation that an ethnic writer will write about what he or she knows best, namely his or her ethnicity, and that he or she will do so in a manner that is not merely referential but didactic, designed to explain his or her demonstrable 'difference' (141).

This disavowal can be taken as Melfi's own rebellion against the constraints of community-based and multicultural Italian Canadian theatre. Refusing to confine passionate speech and action within the familiar grounds of everyday life within the Italian Canadian communities, Melfi is seemingly declaring war on that particular type of theatre, backing instead a theatre of rough edges which can be put to new use.

Claudio Cinelli (1958-)[21]

I was put into contact with Claudio Cinelli, founder of the theatre company Porte Girevoli, through Antonio D'Alfonso, who, on hearing the subject of my thesis, told me that Cinelli would be essential to my research. Cinelli calls Montreal his only home, having migrated there from Italy at the age of eleven. However, his regular returns to Italy to visit his relatives have enabled him to feel completely at ease in both locations. His upbringing has provided him with the proficiency to perform in either French or English and in traditions as disparate as Italian Commedia dell'Arte, Gélinas, and Michel Tremblay. As I found out, Cinelli contributes significantly to the study of transcultural Italian Canadian theatre.

As with Chiarilli, I witnessed Cinelli on stage before having the opportunity to interview him in person. This happened some time later, at the end of July 2011, when he gave me a tour of the small theatre he had recently acquired on Ste. Catherine Est, a space – he proudly explained – where finally 'Porte Girevoli is able to create without limits' (28 July 2011). From talking to Cinelli that day I was able to complete the picture I had of him after first watching him perform, and to understand just what it meant to him to have a theatre he could call his own.

Cinelli's life and work have always been about negotiating the divide that separates his Anglo-Canadian, Québécois, and Italian identities. His first memories of the theatre – so he explained to me – were when his parents would take him as a young boy to see Agostino Venier's rumbustious performances in Little Italy[22] and Michel Tremblay's equally lively plays in the mainstream theatres of Montreal (28 July 2011). His parents, avid travellers in their own right, would also take him on their regular excursions to Italy to visit relatives. Eventually, the Cinelli family ended up relocating

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[21] For his (partly inaccurate) biography (last updated in 2006), see: http://www.claudiocinelli.it/ [last accessed: October: 2013].
[22] See *Act I*, pp. 95-99.

to Italy altogether in the late 1970s. From that point on Cinelli was immersed in both Québécois and Italian cultures, living and attending public school in Anglophone Montreal: 'I was Italian but lived in a Francophone region and did a lot of Quebec Theatre, where I performed in French but my first language I feel is English because the schools I attended have been taught in English' (28 July 2011). As such, Cinelli felt that within Anglo-Montreal he was experiencing a 'serious identity crisis' (28 July 2011), one he would eventually look to solve through theatre (28 July 2011). He went on to study acting at universities in Montreal and Toronto and then finally in Italy, at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan. Since his time there he has had a diverse and active career, having worked with Giorgio Strehler's Theatre Company,[23] on Broadway, and in Canadian English-language films in addition to acting in French-language productions staged in mainstream theatres in Montreal. Consequently, he has earned a reputation for being a highly adaptable and accomplished theatre practitioner in both his home and host countries.

Since 1992, however, Cinelli has been working with his own theatre company, Porte Girevoli, with the intention of establishing – in his own words – a 'cultural bridge between Italy and Canada' (28 July 2011). This has meant staging works that appeal to audiences in both locations in French and English, as well as fostering the work of Italian playwrights and directors across the globe. It has taken extreme determination to maintain this goal for all kinds of reasons, but one that stands out is the fact that for the first six years of the company's existence it was homeless, unable to afford a full-time

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[23] Giorgio Strehler (1921–1997) was a famous Italian actor, producer, and director, establishing himself as 'the leading new force in Italian theatre' in post-war Italy when, together with actor Paolo Grassi, he founded the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, in 1947 (Wardle 1984:15). Strehler is also the creator of the first European Theatre Festival, with his work having influenced Schechner's, in parallel with the route pioneered by Peter Brook (Wardle 1984:15). For more on Strehler, see Richard Trousdell's article (1986), 'Giorgio Strehler in Rehearsal', in *The Drama Review*, 30 (4), particularly pp.65-7, and his annotated bibliography (75-83).

theatre space in which to work. This led the company to float back and forth between Canada and Italy, staging productions whenever, wherever, and however it could.

For Cinelli, this travelling back and forth became a costly venture, 'loading sets and props on planes and making sure company members [could] make the trip' (28 July 2011), but adding to the financial burden was the fact that Porte Girevoli prided itself on being a professional company and that all members were paid for their work, from the actors and director to the technicians and managers. By calling it a professional company, Cinelli was also making it more difficult to collect government funding. Currently, 'Porte Girevoli receives nothing in the form of grants,' and Cinelli explains that obtaining them is 'a highly competitive venture' that requires 'a full time staff member to solely focus on the business side of things, [whereas] right now the company is made up of creative artists with neither the experience nor the time for the responsibility' (28 July 2011).

My interview with Cinelli revealed a few home truths about the murky world of Montreal theatre in general. Within this community, he explained, there are two entities: theatre companies and cultural agencies. The city is more apt to offer funding to the latter as their goals of servicing the community are clearly defined and amenable to functioning within the multicultural framework,[24] whereas the former are generally considered to pertain to the cultural goals of only a small few. The revamping of multicultural policy has made things even more difficult now, with cultural agencies, on receiving their grant money, often putting it straight into their own theatre companies. This can be done in a variety of ways: 'from covering basic production costs, paying teachers to conduct workshops or, in frequent cases, building state-of-the-art venues in which to permanently work' (28 July 2011). What then happens is that 'the theatre company associated with the cultural agencies gains such a reputation for their excellent

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[24] See *Act II*, pp. 118-19.

quality of theatre that they assume the identity of a professional company, even when they do not pay their company members.' Cinelli is hesitant to use the word dishonest in describing this practice. Instead, he indirectly refers to their actions as taking advantage of a loophole in the system:

> Porte Girevoli is not technically a cultural agency, but we are still providing a service to the community. Even so, it goes officially unrecognized by the city's funding board. We cannot compete. (28 July 2011)

Although he makes no mention of a specific cultural agency, I believe he is referring to the Piccolo Teatro di Montreal, the company most closely affiliated with the Italian cultural agency serving Montreal's Little Italy since the 1970s.[25] After a long period of inactivity, in 1997 the company received a grant of roughly four million Canadian dollars to improve its facilities and ended up building a technologically advanced theatre of some nine thousand square feet, which it regularly rents out to the QDF. The sting of such a generous offering was felt by independent theatre practitioners like Cinelli who, in his own words, 'were struggling financially to 'establish their own theatre companies by way of conducting workshops, ticket sales and private donations in addition to privately financing productions and paying bills with their own money when the need [arose].' (28 July 2011)

As of 2001, with the help of Cinelli's own savings and loans from friends and family, Porte Girevoli was finally able to make a permanent home for itself by leasing space on Ste Catherine Est, a former office building that has since been converted into a multi-floored performing arts center located in the heart of Montreal's theatre district. The particular theatre space Porte Girevoli rents comprises most of the fifth floor and includes two small rehearsal studios and two theatres. (The larger theatre has seventy-five seats, the smaller roughly fifty.) The smaller of the two is the preferred performing space of the company, with old-fashioned seating and well-equipped lighting and sound.

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[25] See *Act I*, pp. 106-7.

It has been named after the Italian theatre icon and one-time teacher of Cinelli, Giorgio Strehler, 'to pay hommage to a wonderful intellectual and further build a connection with Italy' (28 July 2011).

Cinelli explains that, ever since its opening, the spaces in the studio have been in high demand with small independent companies, individual artists, and Canadian production companies which consider them ideal for holding auditions. As a result, Cinelli admits he supplements the rent he pays for his space by sub-leasing it to third parties who often 'use it for a weekend run of their work or [to] conduct a workshop' (28 July 2011). To Cinelli, perhaps just as meaningful as the space itself is its address. Unlike the other established theatre company of Montreal, Il Piccolo Teatro, which is situated in Montreal's Little Italy, Porte Girevoli is located right in the heart of Montreal's mainstream theatre district, an indication perhaps that his theatre has moved out of its own precinct although it has certainly not forgotten it in its heart. As Sherry Simon has pointed out, Cinelli's work participates in 'the larger tendency of transnational migrants from Europe which breaks with the neighbourhood's history of successive waves of immigration, a tendency towards taking up temporary residence in the former immigrant corridor, finding a home, in heterogeneity' (2006:385). Simon's observation suggests that this is one of passage, of successive waves of migration, of cultures written one on top of the next.

However, because of the high cost of keeping the space, Porte Girevoli needs full houses for its performances in order to remain financially sustainable. This means that it must maintain an active production schedule that reaches out, not only to Italians and Italian Canadians, but also to much wider audiences that include Anglophone and Francophone Canadians. Roughly ninety percent of Porte Girevoli's productions are performed in English. The latest technological tool Cinelli makes use of is the simultaneous translator, a telephone-like device that enables English- and French-

speaking audiences to understand an Italian-language production and vice versa. However, these devices are expensive so Porte Girevoli often opts for the more economical route of casting bilingual actors who can perform competently in both languages (28 July 2011). Cinelli realises that the crucial factors in reaching wider audiences are the material he selects and the style in which he presents it. Porte Girevoli's productions must have universal appeal and, as a consequence, Cinelli works mostly in terms of a conventional naturalism. This is Porte Girevoli's most obvious difference from Chiarilli and Melfi. Crossing over to mainstream theatre, while still trying to remain connected to the migrant community, even the home country, is a particularly difficult balance to strike. Cinelli does so by creating what he refers to as theatre that 'transcends borders' – a transcultural theatre.

The production history of Porte Girevoli indicates its commitment to doing this. The company's first production was *Signora Giulia* (2001), an Italian adaptation of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. The decision to stage this particular play stemmed from Cinelli's classical theatre background, but in an attempt to connect with Italian Canadian and Italian audiences he localised it, incorporating a symbolically suggestive set and traditional Italian folk music. He set Strindberg's story of a daughter of a wealthy member of the aristocracy falling in love with a male domestic servant within the high society of Italy, believing that the story would carry resonance with its audience. He proved right. The production was a great success, offering Italian Canadians and Italians an invaluable opportunity for self-reflection, and, as a result, it had an extended run due to popular demand in both Montreal and Italy. Italian theatre critics called it 'international theatre that maintains a national identity' (Dragone 2002:98; translation mine).

Unlike Chiarilli, Cinelli often hires outside help when staging work, bringing in the cast and crew needed in order to see the production through to the end of its run.

Moreover, those he hires are not always Italian. For example, Montreal's production of *Signora Giulia* had a Spanish director, José Daniel Bort, and a lead actress from France, Marie Nadar. However, when performing in Italy, Cinelli would often find local supporting actors so as to cut down on costs and encourage the involvement of local talent in his theatre whenever possible. But since *Signora Giulia,* Cinelli, burdened as he is by economic challenges, has had to focus on staging work that requires less in the way of set and cast.

Porte Girevoli's next production *Extremities* (2002), *Estremi* in Italian, by the Anglo-Canadian poet/playwright James Reaney, was a more mainstream production, made for travelling to and from Italy. While it was also well received, with local press calling Cinelli's combined naturalistic and minimal approach to theatre representative of a 'new Italian aesthetic' (Dragone 2002:94; translation mine), it was above all the content of the play that would break new ground in contemporary theatre, beyond the national borders of both Italy and Canada themselves.

Extremities, a disturbing drama with elements of black humour, is about the graphic brutalisation, both physical and psychological, of a young woman in her own home by a male intruder. During the course of her harrowing ordeal she reverses the balance of power and imprisons her attacker. She then weighs her options: whether to mete out brutal punishment of her own or to offer compassion. The play's graphic scenes and brutal frankness set a precedent in Italian theatre which, up to this point, had been somewhat strait-laced. As Cinelli explains:

> I think *Estremi* struck a nerve in Italy. It is still a very conservative country and this controversial play about female empowerment, turning the tables on her would-be rapist, affected audiences and critics alike. Nothing like this, that I know of, has ever been shown in Italy. (28 July 2011)

Cinelli again localised the story, setting it in Italy in order to better communicate the play's themes to Italians. Ironically though, this particular production featured only two

Italian speakers: Cinelli himself, as the intruder, and the Montreal-trained supporting actress Isabella Pola. The three other actors involved were from Toronto (the director, Mark Colt), France (female lead, Marie Nadar), and Argentina (actor, Pablo Martín).

Migrants (2005)

Although *Signora Giulia*, and *Extremities* were commercially successful for Porte Girevoli, they did little to contribute to the debate around Italian Canadian transcultural theatre. That would be the main purpose behind the company's 2006 staging of *Migrants/Migranti* (2005). I witnessed Cinelli's production of *Migrants/Migranti*, with the help of Chiarilli as stage designer, in Milan at Piccolo Teatro on 20th October 2010 during the XX International Theatre Festival. While my observations of this specific production will serve as the basis for the following analysis, I will also consider comments made by Cinelli during our July 2011 interview regarding subsequent Montreal performances of *Migrants/Migranti*. Combined, they provide insight into the way this work specifically relates to present-day migration to Canada and the various cultural and socio-economic issues these migrants face in their daily lives.

On viewing Cinelli's play, I could not help but compare it to Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* (1965), with its naturalistic aesthetic, and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952), with its ambiguity, existential themes, and often absurd circular dialogue. *Migrants/Migranti* is a one-act play realistically set inside a dark, dank basement apartment on New Year's Eve. It features two nameless, lonely migrants: one an exiled intellectual identified in the script as AV; the other an illegal manual labourer, X. The two spend the evening together discussing their dreams, fears and philosophies.

Although Cinelli explained to me that he has played both roles at one point or another throughout the various runs of the play, it is the role of the exiled intellectual to which he is drawn, especially since the character is a creative artist struggling for a

voice within a foreign society. This is a role with which he can certainly identify and the one he was playing in the performance I saw. The character of X, the uneducated labourer, was being portrayed in this particular performance by long-time collaborating partner and accomplished Italian Canadian actor, Gianpaolo Venuta. The two actors were directed in turn by Tony Nardi, but, as Cinelli explained in my interview with him, it was he alone who worked with the dramaturgy of the play. When talking about the subject matter of *Migrants/Migranti*, he admits the words would flow like 'magic':

> When I picked it up I couldn't put it down. The story about a person [the intellectual writer] who wants to go back to his country, he dreams of going back, but can't. This is my story. This is why it [writing] was such a natural process.
>   (28 July 2011)

While Cinelli emphasises the importance of the story, its pattern is deliberately ambiguous. The two main characters are anonymous, and references made to their shared homeland are not explicitly given either, though to an informed audience it can easily be recognised as Italy. Cinelli says that he intended to keep it 'a universal story, by not specifically stating the country from which they have migrated.' (28 July 2011) Nonetheless, with *Migrants/Migranti* Cinelli emphasises the themes most relevant to his vision of the Italian migrant community in Montreal: politics and freedom as they relate to an individual's struggle with society, and the tensions and economic disparities between social classes. Underneath this conflict, highlighted by the constant verbal battles between the two characters and their mutual dislike and suspicion, there is a real bond between X and AV in their yearning for a freedom, be it artistic or economic, that is unobtainable in their homeland, and in their hatred of the political and economic systems that have forced them into their migrant existences. This is why perhaps the story is so accessible to Cinelli, Italian, and Italian Canadian audiences alike.

After viewing the performance and interviewing Cinelli, I could not help but think that the character of AV, the intellectual writer, directly represents Cinelli's own

situation and the reality of present-day Italian migrant creative artists as a whole. For example, both currently live in Montreal, in part to secure the political and creative freedoms they believe are lacking in their homeland; and both appear frustrated with the oppressive atmosphere of their homeland as with the passivity of the local population that tolerates it. Under these circumstances, as AV explains to X, he had no choice but to move to Canada for, if he had remained behind, he would have stayed

> [a] monkey in a cage […] I took running jumps from the pole to the wire fencing and back again […] in order to feel the master of my own infinite space.
> (*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010)

It is fairly clear that this line of dialogue rings true with Cinelli, and perhaps, as will be seen, with Chiarilli as well, who admits to preferring to live in Canada over Italy for the inspiration and lack of boundaries it offers the creative artist.

However, AV also voices the dilemma of many Italian migrants like him when he confesses to X that he is still dependent on the coercive system of his homeland for creative inspiration. He explains to AV that:

> In order to write, I had to stop being afraid. So in order to not be afraid, I fled [the country] (*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010).

Ironically, however, the writer concedes that he has not written since fleeing 'because [he's] no longer scared; by fleeing, [he] stopped being a slave and [he] got scattered and dissolved [himself] in freedom' (*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010). The writer is stuck, it seems, in a psychological in-between space that is inhibiting his creativity.

His predicament might offer a reason as to why transcultural Italian theatre practitioners like Cinelli, Melfi, Chiarilli, and others like them, continue to move back and forth between home and host countries so as to acquire the best both countries have to offer: freedom to create, comfort, security, inspiration, and an eager audience. To

remain permanently in either one location or the other – the problem AV is facing – means that at least one of these vital elements would be lost.

While AV resembles the Italian migrant creative artist, X, the manual labourer, though this is not explicitly stated in the play, parallels the typical Italian migrant worker of pre-war migration from Italy.[26] X seems to have little sympathy for AV's lack of spiritual comfort. For him, the issue of freedom in the host country is more fundamental, yet equally unattainable. The economic system of his homeland is broken, dependent on remittances sent from Little Italies all over Canada. He has therefore become a migrant out of economic necessity, not in the search for existential freedom. As he explains to AV, he only knows one kind of freedom: 'when I don't have to work' (*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010). He believes that money holds the key to his liberation; the more he earns abroad, the greater his freedom when he returns home. This goal is skewed, however, by his almost obsessive desire to save as much money as possible. Greed has him working non-stop and unable to put an end to his stay in the host country. Although he is essentially apolitical, X is affected by the political and economic turmoil in his home country, which limits his freedom abroad. He is trapped, unable to stop working and thus unable to return home. X thus echoes the plight of Italian migrant workers between the late 19th and 20th centuries whose transnational movements, dictated by economic considerations, constituted an eternal Sisyphean cycle.

Despite their personal differences and ambitions, AV and X, like their real-life counterparts, are unified by the national history they share, and in that sense they treat each other as equals in the host country. This indebtedness to national history, replete as it is with political oppression, shows itself in the play when AV first admits that he is a political refugee. It is interesting to note the physical actions of AV as he delivers the

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[26] See *Act I*, p. 58.

line. He quickly walks to the door to the apartment, opens it slightly to make sure there are no spies eavesdropping, then returns to the table to resume the conversation. This seemingly innocuous action resonates with audiences who experienced firsthand how, over alternate periods of modern and contemporary Italian history, from Mussolini to the terrorist acts by the Red Brigades throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, a secret spying agency was in place that was constantly searching for subversive activities. AV's nervous actions also reveal the endurance of fear in spite of Italian migrants' relative security in pre-war and 1980s Canada.

While *Migrants/Migranti* could easily be staged as farce, Cinelli adopts a realistic approach to his work so as not to undermine the psychological depth of the play and its economic, political, and social implications for his audiences. The realistic depiction of the characters' absurd situation, which is revealed through the events that occur within their daily lives, works to magnify the absurdity of the migrants' social reality, which is mired in isolation and economic and spiritual poverty.

The play's realism is enhanced by the set design, created by Chiarilli. This depicts in full detail a filthy hovel of a basement apartment with exposed pipes and chain-link fencing that simultaneously acts as walls enclosing the set. Suspended over a small folding table centre stage and two wooden chairs, is a single exposed light bulb. Up stage, and flanking the table, are two cot beds. The apartment resembles a prison cell in its barren starkness. The design works effectively to enhance the migrants' imprisoned lives, or as Chiarilli described it to me during my interview, 'to reveal the stripped souls' of the two men trapped in a 'subterranean hell,' cut off socially from those who live 'above them' (20 July 2011).

When observing *Migrants/Migranti* in Milan on the main stage of Piccolo Teatro, it was interesting to witness the effect this particular production had 'back home' on a predominantly Italian audience. The audience comprised mainly what I

would consider to be the bourgeois theatre society of Milan, middle and upper class Italians usually being the only visitors to the towering national theatre complex (Dragone 2002:95). As Cinelli explained to me, his play is primarily intended for small theatre spaces and the vast size of Piccolo Teatro, a venue that seats over one thousand people, could not help but inhibit the 'intimacy' of the piece. 'How can two actors fill all that space?' (28 July 2011) Indeed, even though I was near the front in the performance I attended, I still felt the substantial distance between the actors and the audience. Cinelli explained to me in interview that he was willing to perform in such a space because – reasonably enough – it accommodated a large audience, and:

> There was great demand to see it and we had little time to show it […] We don't have the freedom to stay in Italy for long periods of time performing. For economic reasons, we have to do short runs and then get back to our lives in Canada as soon as we can. (28 July 2011)

Cinelli also explained to me that when Porte Girevoli performs *Migrants/Migranti* in the fringe theatres, the effect is incomparable. For example, both Cinelli and Chiarilli would go on to perform the work at the Edmonton Fringe Festival the following year, in a roughly one-hundred-seat theatre that is a significantly less formal, more intimate space than Piccolo Teatro:

> The stage was a platform just a foot off the ground; the barrier between stage and audience was completely broken. Plus we were performing in Edmonton. It was such a great community-like atmosphere in that theatre it felt like both the audience and characters occupied the same basement apartment. (28 July 2011)

During my interview with Cinelli, I came to realise how important it is to him to have his theatre work connect directly with his audiences, and he freely admits that in the smaller theatres the chances of achieving this are much greater. To support this claim, he cites a specific line in the play, which he feels carries particular resonance in a smaller venue. This is when the writer (AV) sniffily explains that he is only talking to the worker (X) during their time together as a ploy to understand the slave mentality for the sake of his own writing, and the worker responds with another, more generous

interpretation of the writer's loyalty: 'To talk a bit – it's a typical human thing. Who else would you talk to, if not me? Them?' (*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010). In the Edmonton production, Cinelli explains that when saying the word 'them' the worker gestured to the ceiling, as if to reference those inhabiting the outside world above the audience and characters alike. This stands in contrast to the Piccolo Teatro production I went to when, during the delivery of this particular line, the worker pointed out at the audience, as if to confirm them as outsiders to the migrant world.

When I brought this change in stage directions to his attention, Cinelli did not seem to acknowledge the discrepancy. In his defence, it is a subtle difference, a subconscious manoeuvre perhaps fuelled by the literal distance, or lack thereof, between stage and audience. On a deeper level, it might also represent the symbolic distance – or proximity – between classes. Regardless of this interpretation, the fact that Porte Girevoli decided to perform *Migrants/Migranti* in the context of the International Theatre festival in Milan, in order to meet the significant demand of Italian audiences who wanted to see it, proves that stories regarding migration are by no means only part of the repertoire of contemporary theatre outside Italy.

In Cinelli's realist version of *Migrants/Migranti*, the two actors evolve over the course of the play from the two-dimensional characters that are typical of absurdist drama into full-blown, psychologically complex men who increasingly come to represent the trials and tribulations of Italian migrants. Specifically, Cinelli seems to be flirting with stereotypes, lingering on their commonly ascribed inability to assimilate fully into the host society. For example, X earns money working dangerous construction jobs, operating pneumatic drills which are gradually disabling him. In spite of his daily interaction with the outside world, he refuses to learn English and remains 'the foreigner' to his co-workers. AV berates X for this linguistic deficiency. However, while AV has mastered the new language, his writer's skills are equally meaningless

because he never leaves the apartment and thus remains as alone and invisible as his room-mate. Their shared sense of alienation is expressed by X, who justifies not learning the language because in this new world 'there aren't any real people'(*Migrants/Migranti*, 20 October 2010), thereby playing on the multiple meanings of the word 'vero' – philosophically, socially, and theatrically – as both 'living creatures' and 'truthful'. In this alienated existence, the flawed characters rely only on each other; a reluctance to assimilate is noticeable. The worker's rationalisation that there are no 'real people' in the host country to inspire him to do so could be taken to mean that migration process has given him an 'out'. He does not have to assimilate and is thus more selective about whom he chooses to converse with and to admit to his personal world.

Although Cinelli believes in the realism of the play, it has undeniably absurdist elements, like Melfi's *Sex Therapy*. The ongoing tolerance the two characters display towards each other despite their mutual antagonism is more Estragon and Vladimir, or perhaps Laurel and Hardy, than Felix and Oscar; these are the infamous 'sidekick' characters that represent the yin and yang of existence.[27] The characters of AV and X are existential as they come to represent the two sides of man, one emphasising basic survival (the worker) and the other representing intellectual stimulation (the writer).

The ending of the play is equally absurd, expressing the ultimate denial of true human freedom while highlighting the futility of human existence. At the play's climax, the worker literally tears up his precious savings, ostensibly the one thing that has kept him going in this unappetising foreign world. In a parallel move, AV then destroys his notes for a *magnum opus* on the nature of man's slavery. Both characters assume that they are obliterating the very thing that is enslaving them. For a brief moment, they are

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[27] Vladimir and Estragon are from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Laurel and Hardy from their self-entitled stage and film productions, and Felix and Oscar from Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* (1965).

relieved and vindicated in the eyes of the other for their rash deeds, but their impulsive actions do not change their future. In fact, they make them more vulnerable and dependent. Instead, their acts of destruction represent the definitive loss of meaning for their empty lives.

In our interview, Cinelli explained to me that he sees this scene as a metaphor for the many migrants who come to Montreal hoping their lives will automatically change for the better. As Cinelli, Melfi, and Chiarilli can testify, adjusting to life in Canada, especially as playwrights, takes incredible stamina. Primarily, what Cinelli hopes to convey through his work *Migrants/Migranti* is that freedom is elusive under any circumstances because it is individuals, rather than social or political systems, who are responsible for human freedom. In other words, migration is an endless treadmill that does not automatically grant escape from oppression.

The final scene of *Migrants/Migranti* encapsulates this political theme. After destroying their most prized possessions, the life savings and the *magnum opus* respectively, the worker and the writer both lie down on their beds, and soon after the former is heard soundly snoring and the latter crying. This hints at the idea that in a country like Canada, money is perhaps easier to obtain than intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.

Porte Girevoli's production of *Migrants/Migranti* has had a profound impact on audiences in both host and home countries. It questions the existential advantages that are frequently posited by advocates of migration, advantages which revamped Canadian multicultural policies also seem to have pursued over the last twenty years. Is there actual economic and spiritual freedom to be had in Canada? Cinelli makes concerted efforts to strip away the illusions and assumptions one might have in a provisional answer to this question, which might be one reason behind the play's popularity in Italy.

Notwithstanding, for Cinelli, taking *Migrants/Migranti* to Italy proved initially challenging due to a chronic lack of funding. Ironically, it was the Canadian Embassy in Rome that intervened and financed the company's participation in the International Theatre Festival, where they presented *Migrants/Migranti* to a full house the night I saw it. To be endorsed by the Canadian Embassy for such an occasion is symbolic in itself, indicating the play's relevance to both host and home theatre communities.

In my interview with Cinelli in July 2011, and after seeing his work in performance, it was abundantly clear to me that, although he has spent the majority of his life living in Montreal, he considers it vital to keep a connection to Italy. He does so by making theatre that is historically and socially relevant in both home and host countries and by making sure that Porte Girevoli maintains a distinctly transnational presence. However, this has not come without sacrifice and compromise. In leading a professional theatre company, Cinelli is constantly concerned with the bottom line: financial stability. This has led Porte Girevoli into uncharted waters for Italian-Canadian theatre as transcultural theatre, crossing over to mainstream theatre while still trying to keep producing works fed by community-based theatricals. Cinelli admits to wanting to do work in the Grotowski and Schechner moulds, as Chiarilli does; however, Cinelli believes that 'this kind of theatre doesn't make it to commercial venues in Canada' (28 July 2011). Instead, he must stage work that is more 'conventional in both English and Italian' (28 July 2011). It also means he must spend much of this time working as a landlord, renting out his theatres on the fifth floor of his building to all and sundry in order keep Porte Girevoli in operation.

For now, Cinelli appears to be content to pay the price, nurturing the further goal of one day being established enough to conduct theatre classes for Italian youngsters so 'they can learn English through theatre, the way [he] did' (28 July 2011), and to create the conditions under which Italian companies might be invited to Canada and given a

place to play. These altruistic efforts indicate that Porte Girevoli is doing more than any other company of its kind to blur the border between home and host countries and to generate a unique space for transcultural Italian Canadian theatre.

Carlo Chiarilli (1960-)

Carlo Chiarilli is the most recent transnational migrant to arrive in Toronto from Italy, in 1996, and the most active one to remain within the Italian Canadian theatre community in Toronto, dividing his professional career equally and successfully between Italy and Canada. He is thus the most direct representative of my understanding of how transnational migration has affected Italian Canadian theatre practices over the last twenty years. Witnessing his seminal work, *Migrant Ventures* (2009)*,* on 19th July 2011 at Teatro degli Stracci in Toronto, was a key event that inspired me to pursue research into the effects of transnational migrant playwrights on Italian Canadian theatre. His is genre-bending work, a unique blend of the various theatre genres previously investigated in this thesis: cabaret, Commedia dell'Arte, and community-based theatre. I consider this blend to be an indication of where Italian Canadian theatre is heading in the current age of globalisation. Since seeing Chiarilli perform *Migrant Ventures* in Canada, I have also watched him put on other theatre pieces in Bologna and have extensively interviewed him regarding his life and work. The following findings, supported by selected published material, come from this field work.

Mapping Chiarilli's career as a transnational Italian Canadian theatre maker invariably means tracing his roots back to his Italian homeland where, as Chiarilli himself explains, he started writing plays and creating characters at the age of eight. However, he attributes his development of an early passion for theatre to one of his first teachers, Luca Ronconi, a prominent Italian popular theatre director, who with his own

company has been responsible for cultivating the Italian fringe theatre movement and has nurtured the talent of many in the next generation of contemporary Italian theatre practitioners (Quadri et al. 1981).[28] However, Ronconi seems reluctant to take any credit for Chiarilli's success:

> Carlo, even at a young age, developed such unique corporeal expression, it was difficult for him to do anything but his own work; physical theatre came naturally and came quickly to him […] Canada I'm sure is pushing him to explore it further' (Ronconi in Quadri 1999:56; translation mine).

It would be a while yet before Chiarilli would arrive in Canada. He first graduated from Ronconi's Theatre School near Rome, and then travelled internationally, settling for a while in Paris. It was there that he began to explore his interest in cabaret and the art of solo performance. Cabaret is the perfect medium for Chiarilli, who, when on stage, is equal parts singer, dancer, and stand-up comedian. He has modified the genre creatively by uniquely blending it with Italian popular theatre techniques that stem from the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, like one of his predecessors, Agostino Venier,[29] and from his training with Ronconi. This enables him to portray a wide variety of parodic, larger-than-life characters that tell tragicomic stories through monologue and direct address to the audience. This expansive style defines his work.

From Paris, Chiarilli travelled to Holland and Belgium, gaining life experience and professional expertise. He explains that it has been his travelling, 'coming into contact with other realities,' that has given him the material for what he calls his 'chameleon-like work,' and has enabled him 'to gain the capacity to transform [himself] according to place – whether it is France, Belgium, Italy or Canada' (Chiarilli, 20 July 2011). For Chiarilli, though, there was little doubt that if he was to take himself seriously as a theatre practitioner, North America would have to be the place of long-

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[28] For more on Ronconi's work, see Quadri (1999), and Stanton and Banham (1996:319). For more on his School and his theatre theories see Quadri et al. (1981); Nagy et al. (2013:524); Pavis (1998:252).
[29] See, *Act I*, pp. 94-6.

term settlement. Therefore, unlike earlier Italian Canadian playwrights in this thesis,[30] it

was art, not economic struggle, that was his motivating factor for migrating to Canada,

notably to Toronto, a city which offered him a clear idea of:

> Where you stand in reference to other *teatranti* (theatre practioners) worldwide
> […] It [Toronto] causes you to keep your feet on the ground. When you are
> thinking you are the best, there is always somebody who has arrived from
> somewhere else who is better (Chiarilli, 20 July 2011).

Moreover, Chiarilli refers to 'Toronto [as] the gateway to the rest of the world'

(20 July 2011), and it therefore offers him endless inspiration as a writer he would not

have had in Italy, which for him remains quite 'insular' (20 July 2011). Furthermore, he

points out that 'here [Canada] things change very dramatically from neighborhood to

neighborhood: this is inspiring for a creative artist, there is great potential to observe.'

(20 July 2011)

Chiarilli's relocation to Toronto in 1996 was not easy. Like most newly-arrived

intellectuals migrating to the city, and like many fellow Italian nationals before him, he

inevitably found himself preoccupied with economic hardship. While working in a

restaurant to combat the high cost of living in Toronto, with what little free time he had

he enrolled in dance classes in the city (the owner would let him attend at a discount in

return for cleaning the studio's bathrooms):

> It could have been easy to forget why I came to Toronto, so many who come here
> to do theatre get distracted doing other things like surviving. It took me three
> years before I felt I had the time and energy to begin performing again. (Chiarilli,
> 20 July 2011)

Chiarilli now has an apartment-cum-rehearsal space just south of Adelaide

Street, in the north of the Toronto Theatre District. With an active performance schedule

back in Italy, he has become a leader within the contemporary Italian theatre scene,

ironically only after having established himself in Toronto.

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[30] With the exclusion, perhaps, of Mesaglio; see *Act I*, pp. 100-102.

The way Chiarilli explains it, his Toronto theatre career initially began with his move to a small apartment in 'the centre of everything', on King Street West (20 July 2011). He decided to form a theatre company called Teatro degli Stracci (Theatre of Rags) in the late 1990s for the sole purpose of keeping his mind on performing, writing, training, and devising theatre pieces. The company was a way to fight being 'cancelled out' in face of the plethora of distractions that typically confront migrants, such as improving their English and earning money (Chiarelli, 20 July 2011).

Teatro degli Stracci was not intended to be about the end product, creating shows for paying audiences (20 July 2011). Rather, Chiarilli's time was spent on the physical and textual experimentation (20 July 2011) that helped him make the transition from cabaret act to theatre practitioner. His work with the company, mostly newly qualified Canadian actors eager to start their acting career (20 July 2011), helped him formulate a training ritual he still maintains today, one he describes as an assortment of physical activities:

> I usually begin training at 6:00 a.m. and usually continue until 2:00 p.m. I devote the rest of the day to making my own costumes, inspired by the Commedia dell'Arte (20 July 2011).

This is why Chiarilli decided on the name Stracci, the Italian word for rags, to represent what he does, which is to form stories by first forming characters. Chiarilli typically creates characters by experimenting with physical actions, 'manipulating the body like a piece of fabric' (20 July 2011). This practice is what makes his work a distinct feature within Toronto-Broadway transcultural projects:

> I enjoy the physical capabilities of theatre. While all other actors in Toronto seem to be preoccupied with the sole words and lines, immersing themselves in their character, I desire to perfect the skill of being able to take on and off the character's mask at any given moment on stage. This makes it possible for me to play a variety of characters in a single work. (20 July 2011)

Although he is hesitant to associate himself with any 'official' or well-publicised theory of performance, two names that were mentioned more than once in my

conversations with him were Jerzy Grotowski and, to a lesser extent, Eugenio Barba. In witnessing a Chiarilli performance, there is much he takes from Grotowski's theories about the actor, especially regarding the actor's relationship with the audience. As Grotowski himself puts it:

> If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. (Grotowski in Mitter 1992:90)

Consistent with Grotowski's concept of 'poor theatre', Chiarilli strips away excess, eradicating obstacles in his work in order to get to the truth of the subject and character(s) he is portraying. He does this by economising: treating all theatrical elements – scenography, character, costumes – as one single unit during the devising process. This also includes composing the music that he performs live on stage or, at other times, has pre-recorded (20 July 2011). To Chiarilli, working as a dramaturge and a creator of all aspects of production, leads to a theatre form that is 'organic and professional', with no gratuitous elements (20 July 2011). As he explains, he 'writes with the body,' employing improvisational and 'workshopping' techniques from which other theatrical components, costume and design for example, naturally flow (20 July 2011). Pivato considers this to be an increasingly prominent dramaturgy among emerging Italian Canadian creative artists, who devise such works because they consider an individual response necessary in the absence of relevant texts or believe that theatre is a truly integrated space for the convergence or equalising of theatrical languages (2007, 2012). As a result, theatre practitioners like Chiarilli practise a dramaturgy in which the text is subordinated to the creative process, and in which the body and its presence are pivotal.

Chiarilli has rarely had trouble establishing a connection with multiple audiences, and those in Canada and Italy are no exception. He engages them directly by

blending song and dance with spoken text in dialect, producing cathartic, original work that involves telling bittersweet stories. Chiarilli claims that this genre is typically suited to Italians, a people inclined to approach their social, political, and economic problems in this expansive manner:

> It is a way to maintain dignity in the face of difficulty. It is in that sense which I want to preserve the dignity of the characters. Being able to laugh shows strength of character and it is an effective way to teach and offer the audience a bonding experience. (20 July 2011)

There is no doubt that Teatro degli Stracci opened doors for Chiarilli professionally in Italy. Since his productions of *Migrant Ventures*, he has returned to the country roughly once a month either to perform or to direct and produce the work of others. It is an exhausting lifestyle, but there are significant reasons for maintaining it. First, and most obviously, it provides him with income. His performances in Italy today are consistently sold out and what he earns from ticket sales in the country keeps him financially secure back in Canada. Given the increasing economic woes of the theatre sector, both in Canada and Italy, and the decreasing number of theatre projects (Wasserman 2002), this puts an ironic twist on the transnational process, begging the question: why not just remain in Italy? But to reiterate, Chiarilli lives in Toronto not as a matter of economic necessity, but out of artistic inspiration. It is only there, at least in his eyes, that he is able to witness and learn from a variety of avant-garde theatre practitioners and to gain material for his stories and colourful characters. This in turn makes him an effective writer, affording him a fresh perspective on 'Italy-on-the move' by

> observ[ing] and creat[ing] characters from what I see around me on the streets and on the subway. My work has a flavor that connects with the Italian Canadian community here in Toronto and […] the Italian migrant. (Chiarilli, 20 July 2011)

In a further ironic twist, by using Toronto as a professional base, Chiarilli's stature as a theatre practitioner back in Italy automatically rises. 'People tend to take

you more seriously when you say you are from here [Toronto]' (Chiarilli, 20 July 2011). However, another reason for returning to Italy as frequently as he does is to test out new material. Before performing a new work in Toronto, he will premiere it in Italy, where it receives candid reviews: 'Italians are less inclined to be politically correct in their opinions and if it works there, then I know I accomplished what I set out to do' (20 July 2011).

Migrant Ventures (2009)

The basis for much of the material above was an interview with Chiarilli in July 2011 at his home in Toronto. Unassuming and soft-spoken in person, the antithesis of many of his stage characters, he explained that he has very little furniture in the apartment so as to keep the space versatile for rehearsal purposes: 'At any moment in the day, when we are all free, we might decide to rehearse, the apartment is not filled with things we cannot clear easily' (20 July 2011). At this time, Chiarilli was preparing to 'resurrect' a few of his favorite works in order to perform them in Canada and at the Summer Fringe Festival in Toronto. Yet the most commercially successful of these is the one I saw in Toronto in 2011, *Migrant Ventures* (2009), in which Chiarilli plays the part of four separate Italian migrants comically sharing their tragic stories of adjusting to life from the economic and socio-cultural margins of Toronto. The work is not based on any specific real-life individuals, but rather on everything he has heard and observed in Canada and in the Italian migrant community of Little Italy in Toronto.

Chiarilli adds a sad twist through the title of the work, which seems to suggest a pointless journey. The play itself serves as a less than subtle critique of the displaced migrant who is often ill-equipped to confront the demands of the host society: 'many of them supposedly migrated to chase the promise of the multicultural policy, pursuing new business opportunities,' he says, 'and they made their lives ineffective instead' (20 July 2011). Not only has this work garnered critical and popular acclaim within the

Italian Canadian community in Toronto (20 July 2011), but Chiarilli has also performed it in Montreal, Vancouver, and Ottawa, and over fifty times in Italy over the last four years, not to mention Buenos Aires, New York, and Mexico City.

Chiarilli explained to me that the basic idea for *Migrant Ventures* developed while he himself was still adjusting to life in Canada. Like Agostino Venier before him in Montreal, from the window of his small apartment Chiarilli would watch daily the 'new arrivals' in Toronto's Little Italy. As these migrants walked, suitcase in hand, along the streets directly below his window, Chiarilli would create stories about the ones he would see on a regular basis. It was this everyday side of migration that Chiarilli felt needed to be told through these characters by way of four separate monologues. The way he worked on the piece was to first sketch out key lines of the text so he could then begin experimenting with the physicality of each of the characters, 'playing mannerisms, exaggerating and expanding, but always careful to avoid clichés' (20 July 2011), and, in typical Chiarilli tradition, from this initial physical work there eventually emerged a more complete text.

The four characters Chiarilli portrays in *Migrant Ventures,* however, go one step further, specifically representing the underbelly of the Italian Canadian experiences of migration. For example, the first character Chiarilli introduces to the audience is Maria Dolcevita, her last name sarcastically meaning 'sweet life'. She is a frustrated poet who as a child back in rural southern Italy saw each of her eight brothers and sisters leave for Canada. Afflicted with a serious drug addiction, she finally arrives in Toronto hoping to reunite with her family, only to experience the harsh realities of migrant living as her sisters throw her out. At the end of her monologue she says that she desires nothing more than to return to Italy, a place she once took for granted, but her homelessness, isolation, and illness keep her trapped in Toronto.

The second character Chiarilli presents is Beppe Sirtori, a recovering alcoholic with a university degree in business administration, who left the tranquillity of his village in southern Italy to pursue better economic opportunities in Canada, only to find a job in a factory for a substandard wage. His first year in the city was spent in prison as a result of being falsely accused of murder. He now lives in a state of perpetual suspense, with his suitcase 'under [his] bed filled with rags and savings to go back' to Italy. (*Migrant Ventures*, scene II)

The most comical of the characters is Zaza, a former Italian beauty queen and four-time winner of the annual beauty pageant organised by the *Eyetalian Magazine*. Played by Chiarilli in extensive makeup, wig, and padding, her physical appearance is a symbolic portrayal of a young woman caught between cultures. She is both the proud feminine Mediterranean beauty exuding overblown sensuality, and the migrant victim of North-American pop culture who has arrived in Canada to seek fame and fortune. Desperate to assimilate, Zaza confesses comically that as she set off for Toronto, it was her grandmother who gave her the most valuable advice about making her way: 'Never say no' (*Migrant Ventures*, scene III).

The final character, Passione, also physically depicts the identity crisis often suffered by migrant characters in Chiarilli's work. She is a transsexual, a woman born and raised in a country, time, and body that have always felt foreign to her. Rising above others' contempt, she is convinced that she is a 'bella donna [beautiful woman] trapped inside an ugly body' (*Migrant Ventures*, scene IV), and she arrives in Toronto hoping to find the acceptance that she has been denied elsewhere.

Through these colourful characters, Chiarilli portrays his vision of present-day Italian migration as a repeating process of hardship and disappointment, in contrast with prevailing representations of European migrants to Canada over the last twenty years.[31]

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[31] See above, pp. 180-81.

Each character represents a facet of the idealised notion of what settling in Canada supposedly offers: economic viability, freedom, and acceptance. However, in actuality they all fall victim to the realities of the migration process: drug addiction, poverty, prostitution, and alienation. Chiarilli also craftily addresses the issue of transcultural identity through each of the characters, whether it is in Zaza's transgressive concept of beauty or Passione's confusion over her gender.

The language of the characters is English, intermingled with Italian words which appear randomly in the play text. In performance, each character speaks in their own unique voice, Italian laced with American English, what Chiarilli himself defines in terms of 'clever expressions of popular wisdom reflecting the worst by-products of globalisation' (20 July 2011). Chiarilli has also created a physicality in each of the characters that articulates his understanding of the transcultural, hybrid identity of today's Italian Canadians. For example, Beppe is in constant nervous motion as he talks, sashaying to the sounds of an Italian popular folkdance, *tarantella,* that is always playing in his head; while Zaza, even when laden with the extreme weight of her physical attributes, breezily attempts to carry herself as a winner of a beauty pageant. Both exude a positive energy that conveys an air of optimism even when they face incredible hardship in their daily lives.

A significant aspect of the production is the costumes. These are ludicrously over-the-top inventions that symbolically represent the outsize personalities of the characters. The wigs, breast implants, and flamboyant ball gowns worn by Zaza, along with the extravagant white linen suits of Beppe, for example, give the piece a brash Almodóvarian feel,[32] a trademark of most of Chiarilli's work. However, it is curious that, although the characters exude distinctly Italian qualities, an issue that goes

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[32] Named after the Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar, it is a term I use to describe a series of juxtapositions. Almodóvar creates films that address serious subject matter through absurd and tragic-comic situations and characters. His work is 'often described as glamorous and grotesque, elegant and solemn' (Smith 2000:5).

unaddressed in the performance is race. Chiarilli is dark-skinned, as are the four characters he plays, but throughout the piece there is no reference to race. Although it is taken for granted that the characters are all racial minorities upon arriving in Toronto, in no way do they see their ethnic identity as an obstacle to their progress. For Chiarilli, the avoidance of race seems typical of how contemporary Italian migrants and Italian Canadians now approach the subject after having suffered acute racial discrimination in the past (especially the immediate post-war mass migration in the 1940s).[33] From the performance of *Migrant Ventures* I witnessed in Toronto, I had the distinct feeling that, for the audience at least, the play was not about racial identity but rather about multiple destinies, about the multiple facets of migrants' emblematic lives.

The audience that night was a significant factor in the production. It comprised around 175 people, a wide cross-section of Italian Canadians, Italian migrants and Canadians, social classes and age groups, but all appearing to know each other just the same, with many striking up conversations in Italian and English with the people next to them as they waited for the performance to start. In my interview with Chiarilli (20 July 2011), he explained to me that the typical Repertorio audience consists of many nationalities, but in a theatre like Teatro degli Stracci, an intimate space with seats very close together, audience members are no longer a mixture of different nationalities, but one single community brought together by the stories of the characters.

From the moments the lights went down in the theatre that night to begin the performance, Chiarilli capitalised on this cohesive feeling with his *mise-en-scène* and direct presentation style, elements that have become characteristic of transcultural Italian Canadian theatre as from the 1990s. For example, Chiarilli used no stage props, and his own tools for expression were his distinct physical movements and costume pieces, which helped define each of the characters. The stage was simply lit, with

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[33] See *Act 1*, pp. 65-7.

colours periodically shifting (yellow, red, and blue) in order to accent the text. The set design consisted of only a single table and chair, which throughout the piece served many different purposes. For the character of Beppe, the table was the bed he slept on as well as the floor on which he danced. For the character of Maria, the table and chair were what she used to write her poetry.

More important than the props were the monologues themselves, which took place downstage, reaching directly out to the audience as if each of the characters had recognised and was then attempting to make a personal connection with the group that sat in front of them. Zaza paced back and forth, perhaps to emphasise her costume, while Passione at times was perfectly still as if contained by members of the audience who unwittingly acted as an extension to the genetically male body that imprisoned her.

At other times, the piece had the jubilant energy of a cabaret act. For example, between monologues when Chiarilli had to exit the stage in order to change characters and costumes, the audience was kept entertained by four male backing dancers in bright and revealing costumes who danced a well-choreographed number to pre-recorded music composed by Chiarilli himself. These interludes served a number of purposes, not only allowing time for Chiarilli to go backstage and change from one elaborate costume to another, but also enabling props to be repositioned or taken off stage. Most significantly, the dance sequences provided an opportunity to lighten the mood after an emotionally exhausting monologue. They produced a light-hearted distancing effect that complemented the overall poignancy of the piece while also representing the belief, most clearly conveyed by the character of Beppe, that no matter how difficult life might get, one should never forget to keep dancing.

In a second interview with Chiarilli, roughly two years after I first witnessed the performance of *Migrant Ventures*, and at the time he was preparing to stage it again, I

asked him if his attitude towards the characters and the piece as a whole had changed with time. His response was as follows:

> Playing these characters is like revisiting old friends. Now I feel I am even more emotionally attached to them because we now have a history together. I believe their stories will always remain relevant, because every day there are people arriving to this city from other places hoping to make a life for themselves here. These particular characters happen to be Italian because I was born in Italy, but their stories I feel are universal and timeless. (2 August 2013; translation mine)

VII

Ever since the 1993 marketing and selling of ethnicity by the Chrétien Liberals, a distancing from earlier incarnations of both immigration and multicultural policies can be observed. In no way, has this meant that the earlier rubrics of these two policies have been abandoned. Yet under the aegis of a globalised economy, state actors have used neo-liberal values to guide new policy directions in the sector of immigration and multiculturalism which, more often than not, appear to be at odds with the everyday culture. The economic advantage to be gained apparently underwrites many of the recent cultural projects I have documented in this chapter. Thus, changes in immigration law are predicated on easing the entry of high-skilled workers and investors who can 'contribute' to the Canadian economy. Similarly, multiculturalism has been presented as an area within which to maximise competitive advantage in order to secure markets. This logic is premised on the assumption that a strategic alliance between economic competition and commitment to culture can peacefully co-exist with the policies of the post-war years.

What the current situation still largely fails to do is to ensure the full participation of migrants and ethnic groups in the cultural life of Canada. Either those implementing these models seem unaware of what their practical measures actually mean, or they no longer believe cultural projects to be relevant. Not only are current projects different from the way they were originally conceived, they are significantly

scaled back, and new initiatives to encourage them no longer appear to be on the agenda. Consequently, even as Canada becomes more demographically diverse, there is less discussion of the measures required to keep up the Canadian mosaic to secure the plurality of Canadian identity as seen in cultural terms.

Over the last twenty years there has been an intensification of economic, political, and cultural processes in Canada that transcend, but do not necessarily supersede, the state or its sovereignty. This situation has pushed a new group of transnational migrants from Italy to stake out some solid ground for their cultural activities in Toronto and Montreal, but with an eye on the global world. Michel de Certeau's comment, 'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across' (1984:129) captures the essence of the transcultural theatre projects I have sought to discuss in this chapter, informing the more specific narratives Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli have created in their work. These playwrights all live in a 'third space' where borders have shifted and identity is derived in relation to multiple locations. While, as migrants, they subsist on the impact of their work on the host country, as theatre practitioners they have developed a dramaturgy that merges the local with the global. Theatre scholar Dwight Conquergood refers to this in terms of

> circulations of images [that] get reworked on the ground and redeployed for local tactical struggles. We now are keenly aware that the 'local' is a leaky, contingent construction, and that global forces are taken up, struggled over, and refracted for site-specific purposes (2004:311).

For Melfi, this means writing plays in which her concerns as a transnational migrant resonate with other migrant intellectuals around the globe. Her latest work and *Sex Therapy*, particularly, display a transcultural sensibility which combines her extensive travels around the globe, her education, and her diverse theatre experiences. Melfi's transcultural theatre serves a critical function in challenging organicist notions of culture by highlighting the deeply fragmented and divided nature of society. For Cinelli, it entails studying both Quebec and Italian theatre and incorporating these into

plays that represent a solid vision of past and present Italian migration to Canada. For Chiarilli, transcultural theatre practice involves Grotowskian training rituals that incorporate cabaret and Commedia dell'Arte to create work that reflects his experiences of performing cabaret in North America and western Europe. But, needless to say, the merging of the local and the global did not begin with the three playwrights studied in this chapter. As has been suggested in this thesis, the precursors of contemporary transcultural Italian Canadian theatre include such seminal figures as Marco Micone, or even Amilcare Zanini and Agostino Venier,[34] whose work also spoke beyond their immediate migrant communities. These dramatists' and performers' work is indicative of the fact that migrants have long opened themselves to global influences; it also suggests that what is considered 'place' and 'home' in today's age of globalisation is actually a 'heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange instead of a circumscribed territory, and that a boundary is more membrane than wall' (Conquergood 2004:311).

The other side of this coin is the loathing for a simplified version of the past in the name of a universal sense of history. Julia Kristeva explains this as follows:

> As a manifestation of hatred, the glorification of origins finds its matching opposite in the hatred of origins. Those who repress their roots, who don't want to know where they come from […], think that they can settle matters by fleeing. (1993:2)

Kristeva goes on to assert the need for 'a nation of strangers' – one which would in turn produce a world of 'nations without nationalism.' (2) In essence, she wishes to launch a critique of the idea of the nation, but without a sell-off of all its assets. She also contends that, without the idea of the nation, a host people can make no claim on the respect of those who move there. These individuals, too, must also honour the 'strangeness' of the society and sponsors that welcome them. If the Right obliterates the

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[34] See *Act I* pp. 90-100; and *Act II*, p. 139.

symbolic capital and cultural value of immigrants, Kristeva contends, the Left is often equally at fault in tending to question or erase the value of the national community.

My focus in *Act III* on the emergence of transcultural theatre practices provides a constant reminder that the impact of playwrights and theatre practitioners such as Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli extends far beyond Kristeva's binary; past the figure of the migrant to the individuals and collectivities with which playwrights work. Relevant to this is the role played by their 'social remittances' (Levitt 1999), which can be defined as 'the ideas, behaviours and social capital that flow from receiving to sending communities' (Levitt 1999:926). These are the tools Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli use to imagine a 'new cartography' (Appadurai 1991) that encourages them to try out new gender roles or to experiment with new ideas about history, society, and politics. Once this process has begun, daily life in the communities is changed to such an extent, and migrants and non-migrants often become so dependent on one another, that transnational relationships are inevitably established for the long term (Bhabha 1994; Labelle and Midy 1999).

This does not mean that all members of such communities feel a sense of affinity or solidarity towards one another. There is a continuous divisiveness – an inbuilt hierarchy – in many transnational communities. Long-standing patterns of privilege and access do not disappear merely because they are recreated across borders. In fact, although some optimistic commentators have suggested that transnational migration has allowed its practitioners to rebel against global capital and the nation-state (Labelle and Midy 1999; Satzewich and Wong 2006), or to escape from essentialising national identities (Bhabha 1994), this has not been the case, especially for Cinelli and Chiarilli.

Resistance to the neo-liberal reading of culture has been one of the rallying points in political forms of transnational mobilisation (Henighan 2002), as demonstrated

by the wave of popular 'anti-capitalist' or 'anti-globalization' protests (Schechner 2013) that accompanied the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999, the meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Prague in 2000, and the summit for a proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001.

It is important to realise that the process of globalisation poses unrelenting challenges to Melfi's, Cinelli's, and Chiarilli's work; the most imposing of these centres on economic security. Without doubt, it is the market that has dictated the work and life of each of these three playwrights. Melfi has not had her work staged by a theatre company yet. Cinelli must suppress his desire to experiment in order to assimilate, producing work that is accessible to mainstream theatres in order to fill seats and keep Porte Girevoli's home theatre space. Chiarilli, ironically, must travel back to his homeland at least once a month to perform in order to support his life in Toronto. Consequently, he must make sure the stories he creates will not alienate his audiences in Italy while at the same time attracting wider audiences in Toronto.

After spending time with each of the playwrights, interviewing them, and witnessing Cinelli's and Chiarilli's performances, I can confirm that economic challenges in both home and host countries continue to dictate their careers, especially Cinelli's and Chiarilli's, as active theatre practitioners. However, Chiarilli in particular has responded successfully to these challenges. For instance, he spent much of 2012 working in Italy, in collaboration with Italy-based theatre performers Maria Castello and Carlotta Carretero. This trio is currently performing a collectively devised piece called *ZERO* (2012), which addresses the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, and is inspired by the fact that 2012 was the thirtieth anniversary of the discovery of the disease. The three performers play a total of twelve characters whose stories represent the fact that AIDS/HIV transcends social class. *ZERO* has won wide acclaim in Canada, the US, and

Italy, and productions are still running in Argentina and Mexico. This is perhaps an indication that Chiarilli is becoming less dependent on homeland audiences.

Meanwhile, Porte Girevoli still struggles with financial issues. In 2006, with the partial support of the QDF, Cinelli and the Montreal's collective Chassepinte initiated *Transiti*, a collaborative project between Italy and Quebec that allowed both companies to create a puppet show through a mutual process of cultural and linguistic appropriation. The production, after suffering poor ticket sales, closed in 2012.[35] More recently, Cinelli has formed a company called Cinelli Studios. The company has been established in order to act as a leasing agent for his fifth-floor theatre space, so that Porte Girevoli and the new business never have to intersect. Still, Cinelli has found himself having to work with the Studios to such an extent that Porte Girevoli's artistic endeavours have ceased, at least temporarily. Although economic prosperity has been the result, it also means that Cinelli's greater goal of building a cultural bridge between Italy and Canada through theatre will have to be put on hold at least temporarily.

Commenting on the difficulties facing drama and theatre in the present age of globalisation, Richard Schechner contends that small autonomous cultural groups need to be able to workshop their art without influence or pressure to adhere to established conventions within the global culture stemming from the west (2013:268). A dialectical situation exists for the playwrights considered in this chapter, who creatively engage with the materials, language, and symbols transmitted by both Canada and Italy while casting a critical gaze on the political, economic, and social forces that seem to impact negatively on their art.

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[35] For more on *Transiti*, see Boudreault's review in *Jeu* (2009:144-7).

CONCLUSION

During the course of this thesis, I have mapped some of the shifts that led to the emergence of Italian Canadian theatre. The genealogy that is traced here is necessarily a partial and incomplete story, charting what Raymond Williams described as a 'selective' study rather than a comprehensive guide to how different theatre practices developed (Williams 1961:52). I could hardly aim at fully covering Italian Canadian theatre in any geographical, linguistic, or disciplinary sense. Yet my choices hope to bring with them further possibilities for Italian Canadian and Canadian studies, as well as in the fields of theatre studies and cultural studies, thereby contributing to research strategies which facilitate and invite related work from other angles and research itineraries in response.

In my analysis of qualitative theatre material, I have endeavoured to seize its potential for a reading of Italian Canadian ethnicity through theatre, providing examples that illuminate how concepts of community, multiculturalism, and transculturalism have been absorbed and challenged by both Italian Canadian communities in Toronto and Montreal and their respective Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners. Concomitantly, this thesis captures moments when paradigm shifts have occurred from one prevailing theatre mode to another, showing how these practices have contributed to the emergence processes of devising community-based theatricals, multicultural, and transcultural theatre practices.

The structure of this study means that divisions have been made between different aspects in the cultural history of Italian Canadians, with sub-sections focusing on its social, political, and creative dimensions. The inevitable demarcations that occur here have resulted from the structural patterning the thesis follows, and are intended to indicate broad classifications of a devised framework rather than to lay down strict

parameters for how the predominance of a specific theatre mode contributed to the production of Italian Canadian ethnicity (*Act I*), its consolidation within the Canadian nation (*Act II*), and the extent to which Italian Canadian ethnicity is currently opening up beyond Canada (*Act III*).

Though this thesis has illustrated theatre work through three specific case studies, it is intended to be used to open a general dialogue across its boundaries. Indeed, a thematic reading of the qualitative theatre material discussed here tracks the processes through which the emergence of Italian Canadian theatre practices has challenged cultural and social conventions within a context of reciprocity and exchange rather than treating these practices as isolated and counter-hegemonic exercises. It also considers the ways in which Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners have influenced each other, and how a genealogy of Italian Canadian theatre makers emerges through these patterns of influence. Some dance, sing, and perform original work or traditional folklore either solo or collectively in groups, and in conventional theatrical spaces, while others use the dramatic genre to reconstruct historical events or to fill a hole in the cultural representation of Italian Canadians. There are also many differences between the theatre practitioners and playwrights themselves. They are young and old and represent various social classes; some are university and professionally trained; others self-taught.

Although it might have been easier to explain how these particular creative intellectuals differ, I discuss instead the significant traits their theatre work displays. My reason for doing so is not only to seek out how Italian Canadian theatre groups, theatre practitioners, and playwrights can effectively be linked together, but also to create a model for comparison in a broader context. This does not mean I now wish to homogenise the material I have examined, as this would deny the importance of historical specificity. Yet I believe that several pertinent points can be made about the

particular junctures of Italian Canadian theatre practices that have provided the focus of this thesis, especially as regards the attitudes towards ethnicity that have emerged from my readings of these texts.

To begin with, the theme of identity is a constant in the many works discussed in this thesis. Prior to the institutionalisation of multicultural policies in the 1970s, the experiences of Italian Canadian theatre in Toronto and Montreal confirmed a retreat of Italian Canadians within their respective ethnic communities. Segregated and cordially ignored, when not despised, by the 'two solitudes,' post-1947 Italian immigrants appeared to be distanced from Canadian life, and, in response to derision and more subtle forms of discrimination, they matured their ethnic consciousness within the immediate vicinities of their own ethnic enclaves, drawing on the help of theatre practitioners and companies such as Amilcare Zanini, Agostino Venier, and Bruno Mesaglio's Piccolo Teatro Canadese.

By the 1970s the children of these immigrants, who arrived in Canada with their parents with the second wave of immigration from Italy after the Second World War, had absorbed Canadian culture from school and mass media. Inevitably, Italian Canadian plays that emerged in this period problematised the intersection of *la via vecchia* with la *via nuova*. The result was often a collision of a generation of parents, demanding that the old village ways be preserved, with younger Italian immigrants who were torn between their determination to jettison their Italian heritage and their fears of embracing a North American lifestyle. Identity crisis dominated plays by Tony Nardi, Marco Micone, and Caterina Edwards, and was exacerbated by the conflicting messages immigrant parents sent their children: emphasis was placed on education and on making something of themselves while preserving their honour, hard work, and family values. Social obstacles entrenched by prejudice would still temper the success of this particular generation of Italian Canadians. At the same time, the upheaval created by Bill 101 in

Quebec and the rise of multicultural policies on the part of the federal government made their quest for self-identity more problematic. In the end, a sense of community and identity prevailed, which marked the beginning of an ethnic revival among Italian Canadians in Toronto and Montreal.

Contemporary Italian Canadian theatre seems not only to have responded to the climate of global change by shifting the boundaries of performance and theatricality, but also to have re-imagined its cultural and social remits. At this early point in the twenty-first century, Italian Canadian theatre practices hover somewhat precariously between the packaged commodification of mainstream theatre (even in its most avant-garde or experimental forms), as witnessed by Claudio Cinelli's Porte Girevoli, and their need to either discard or politicise reflections on ethnicity in theatrical terms, tendencies embodied by the work of Mary Melfi and Carlo Chiarilli respectively.

As early as in the late 1990s, the majority of the theatre practitioners in this study started to showcase their work in an ever-widening global circuit and, rather than being confined to a particular theatre or building, most theatre groups now expect to tour their work. There was evidence as from this time of a more transnational and transcultural sense of the hybridity of Italian Canadian theatre. Until then, transculturalism and multiculturalism had been mistakenly perceived as mutually exclusive, because multiculturalism had been understood to fix and contain ethnic identities (Kamboureli 1996:112; Keefer in Lammert and Sarkowsky 2010:137). Although many critics have suggested an absolute eradication of multicultural policy as a result,[1] perhaps 'revision' would be the more effective term in addressing the flaws of an already institutionalised concept. While multiculturalism has been accused of forcing ethnic groups into a static identity, the ideology that drives it is also victim of a similar assumption. The theatre material in this thesis shows that, if multiculturalism can accept

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[1] See *Act II*, p. 174.

every ethnic group's stories, this promotes negotiation by acknowledging that a national identity is not fixed and can invite others in. Multiculturalism might then be read as a symbolic space where different cultures live among one another, encouraged to express the narratives that are important to them. Fluid identities – personal and communal – need to renegotiate the past continually, creating a model of history which is made up of several different pasts.

I

The reason for the persistence of identity as the *raison d'être* for Italian Canadian theatre in this study also lies in the fact that these particular plays seek to articulate the experiences of Italian Canadians as an ethnic group. While combating cultural stereotyping, they also aim at strengthening the communal bond generated by ethnic identification, which would otherwise have been considerably weakened as individuals become further removed from their immigrant status. Ironically, in doing so, many of the theatre practitioners and playwrights included here execute in their work what Bhabha considers to be a 'comic turn' within the practice of cultural representation. According to Bhabha, while the national referent (Canada in this case) may justify its cultural subjugation by creating representations of its ethnic groups (Italian Canadians) as 'ignoble, childish, primitive,' so too do the majority of the plays in this study, catalysing a 'destabilising carnival of mimicry' (Bhabha 1994:126). Furthermore, by taking ownership of 'exotic' stereotypes of their own culture, these plays also disrupt the authority of their home country over them (Bhabha 1994:126).

Significant examples of this were found as early as the 1950s, in works by Zanini and Venier. Their immigrant characters were parodic, larger-than-life, syncretic creations adroitly portrayed so as to exist in the painful space between their need to claim an authentic native identity and their desire to combat their historical commodification. By representing the Italian immigrant as the bewildered greenhorn

trying to make his way in a strange and inhospitable country, neither Zanini nor Venier departed from conventional themes in ethnic theatre. Yet their characters all spoke Italiese and were a product of their respective Little Italies in so far as they fashioned their own identities, picking and mixing those cultural traits from within their home and host countries that best defined them. This meant forming an identity which was at a remove from their Canadian present, but also from the old-timers' unconditional love for Italy,[2] thereby marking themselves out as fully independent ethnic individuals.

Contemporary transcultural theatre practitioners like Cinelli and Chiarilli connect with Zanini's and Venier's work in more ways than one. For instance, X, the migrant labourer in Cinelli's *Migrants*, is not only the putative father that Italian Canadian communities are trying to confront; he also represents a more simplistic vision of the migrant as an economic force. Seen from this perspective, X epitomises a critique of transnational migration as a monetised exchange of the migrant workforce. Even so, he is not condemned outright. Chiarilli's *Migrant Ventures* pursues a similar reading through the characters of Zaza and Passione. As extreme, hyper-feminine representations of X, their identity escapes all definition, starting from the one determined by their biological make-up. Zaza and Passione are simultaneously feared and desired – exotic, sensuous, seductive, they are passionate yet innocent and naïve. While in some circumstances these female characters are meant to be purely comedic, their purpose also symbolises the anxieties deriving from globalisation. Both Zaza and Passione are malformed, dysfunctional and lost, and yet still somehow hopeful. The very name 'Passione', 'Passion' in English, carries both sexual and religious connotations, suggesting a strong desire linked to sacrifice. X, Zaza, and Passione all seem to offer an important metaphor for the predicament in which Italian Canadians have found themselves ever since the introduction of multicultural policies in 1971.

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[2] See *Act I*, p. 73.

Caught between their conflicting desires and their distaste for the economic possibilities offered by North America, contemporary Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners want to create theatre work for the sake of art, yet the success of their work remains dependent on economic revenue, be it through multicultural programmes or the financial independence of their own theatre groups.

In this thesis, Canada comes out as a nation with a long history of immigrant settlement. Looking back to earlier times, however, it can be seen that this was not always accepted to be the case. Canada has not always assumed that immigration is a good idea for Canadians. In addition, on occasion, the state has assumed that immigration is good for Canada, but that certain racialised categories of immigrants should not benefit.[3] During the 1930s Depression years, immigrants were viewed as threats to employment, political stability, and, in some cases, national values and culture. During the Depression, the state's focus shifted from welcoming immigrants to excluding and deporting them. The implementation of the points system in the early 1960s and the introduction of multicultural policies in the 1970s helped Canada to gain its reputation as a hospitable country (Roberts 2011:7-8). Yet at present such views, which are premised broadly on liberal values and nationalist-building principles, are once again under threat.

It is therefore not surprising that contemporary Italian Canadian plays express contradictory tendencies. Contemporary state immigration and multicultural policies are still founded on a rhetoric in which immigration is promoted as a 'good idea' because all actors – immigrants and everyone else who lives in Canada – are assumed to gain from it. However, changes in immigration and multicultural policy have been touted as an economic boon, raising the very question of what Canada actually wants to value, especially when it comes to promoting cultural projects like theatre. Whereas in the past

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[3] See *Act I*, pp. 63, 181.

competitiveness and equity might have been viewed as antithetical, the rationale behind exporting policy ideas is that it is possible, indeed desirable, to have the best of both worlds. The implication is that there should be a close relationship between states, citizens, culture, and markets. Increasingly, market ideals and private sector initiatives are viewed as the driving forces of change and dynamism. It is riskily presumed that such initiatives have the potential to provide equal opportunity to all individuals within the market framework.

In spite of economic preoccupations, this thesis has shown that Canada is clearly becoming more multicultural, and that Canadians are becoming more hybrid within the dynamic context of an emerging Canadian ethnicity and identity. At the same time, racism and ethnocentrism are still common (Biles et al. 2008; Reitz et al. 2009), leading immigrants and ethnic groups to find support by strengthening their own ethnic communities, in part through transnational ties. This does not necessarily mean there is a clash between staying together within ethnic groups and forming bridges across them. Rather, the two processes can take place together through a process of selective acculturation in which ethnic groups and immigrants hold onto certain cultural values that retain a home-country identity while at the same time adopting new values that allow them to become Canadian.

II

In its exploration of cultural identity, the theatre material in this thesis also offers a reading of the past through the vehicle of social memory. The characters and the stories they tell are based on collected memories gathered from the playwrights' own observations and from the experiences of those in their communities. Human memory is seen as being influenced by a variety of different factors, and consequently certain parts of the past can never be fully recovered. It is the responsibility of the theatre practitioner to interpret these parts. Psychologist Daniel Schacter contends that '[m]emories are

records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves' (1996:6). The function of the plays in this study seems not so much to be to recount specific historical events, but rather to construct fragments of shared experience. Social memory, the 'we' in Schacter's statement, helps Italian Canadian theatre form complex social and cultural constructions which are reflected in the collective stories of the communities it portrays. In so doing, the plays in this study catalyse a reflexive experience for the audience, the playwright, the theatre practitioner, and the theatre group, acting together as a communal 'life narrator'. While remembering a past moment, 'the personal [is linked] to a community' (Williams 1961:28).

In work such as this, the self-referential 'I' has become a collective 'we', and this conversion is indispensable for capturing the essence of the primary material I have studied here. I have referred to the past of Italian immigrants as being fragmented and inchoate due to Italy's own internal history which, in spite of the many attempts to unify it, was still predominantly fractured when post-1947 immigrants left their Italian villages.[4] The plays discussed in this thesis all have their individual methods of engendering social memory, but generally these include the juxtaposition of diverse verbal and visual stories, an interweaving of images stemming from popular culture, Fascist propaganda, snapshots from the family photo album, historical documents or memorabilia: all these elements combine with what Italian Canadian playwrights observe in their communities or in the outside world on a daily basis. Memories are by definition heterogeneous, and are presented in pastiche sequences that include solo performances of original work and representations of long-standing rituals and folk traditions. Regardless of format, Italian Canadian plays serve as a mirror, but not one through which the playwright, the theatre practitioner, and the theatre group can view themselves; rather, the mirror is one through which they see themselves as being part of

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[4] See *Introduction*, pp. 5-6; 20-1; *Act I*, p. 73.

their communities, and the outcome has consistently confounded notions of Italian Canadian identity held by host and home societies alike.

To support this claim, I could turn to just about any of the plays included in this study. *La Storia*, *Trilogie du silence*, and *Homeground*, for instance, are prime examples in which Nardi, Micone, and Edwards articulate the precise details of their childhood while at the same time depicting images of a collective everyday life in their respective Italian Canadian communities. The same can be said of the work of Zanini, Venier, Mesaglio, and Chiarilli, all of whom produce performance pieces that speak to their audiences on a personal level. The stories they choose to tell embrace a shared vision of the experiences of Italian Canadians. Melfi's work is also concerned with memory although the past is always subject to critique when considered in ethnic terms.

As already suggested above, it is helpful to consider Italian Canadian theatre in this study as a kind of collective autobiography. The autobiographical genre, with its 'complex history' (Carlson 1990:8), has become a logical mode of storytelling for groups to voice their identities (Pickering 2010:xi, 8-9). According to Marvin Carlson, autobiography became popular in the early 1970s with feminists and gay men who created political-leaning guerrilla and street theatre (1990:8, 309). However, Carlson goes on to explain that between the 1980s and the 1990s ethnic groups took ownership of the genre in order to engage in socially conscious performance. In doing so, they stretched the boundaries of autobiography in order to address their own specific concerns with identity. Their 'object and subject are neither in opposition nor merged with each other […], but is the expression of a plurivocal world of communicating bodies, where difference is conceived of not as a divisive element, but as a source of interactions' (Carlson 1990:182). Moreover, as autobiography has come to encompass many diverse theatre practices, many of them presented in this thesis, it is useful in defining the theatre material I have examined here.

While autobiography appears to be the most effective mode through which Italian Canadian plays aim to negotiate social memories from the past, to reflect on identity, and to critique cultural norms, it is also important to consider these plays as representative of a new documentary and ethnographic process. They serve as a conduit, a dynamic relay between personal and communal memory which aims to rework the home and host country's official memories of a group occupying a '[t]hird [s]pace of enunciation' (Bhabha 1994:37). The act of repositioning such histories is a productive means of telling new autobiographical stories that more fittingly represent the often provisional, and nearly always volatile, identities to be found in Italian Canadian theatre from the past to the present day.

This view of identity is connected, directly or indirectly, to the work of Homi Bhabha. With his influential theories on the transnational imaginary,[5] Bhabha has been an important figure in the study of contemporary migration patterns, which comprise a circular, back-and-forth movement between home and host countries (Bhabha 1994:204). His work has spurred on others, who no longer portray migrants as 'simply settlers and sojourners' (Gold and Nawyn 2013:6). In a globalised world, these migrants' memories have become even more complex. Through social networks that move beyond the borders of the nation-state, Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners are now able to work in a host country while maintaining deep-rooted connections to their homeland.

Inevitably, this has led to the work of Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli, who, to an even greater degree than their predecessors, have learnt to live dual lives between the multiple languages and cultures which Italian Canadians had long since embraced.[6] The work of these three playwrights still documents isolated existences, since many transnational migrants do not readily belong to either their home or their host countries.

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[5] See *Act III*, pp. 197-8.
[6] See *Introduction*, p. 14; *Act II*, p. 119.

Even so, their plays open up a different mode of addressing ethnic, social, and political relations – one which, partly as a result of transculturalism, has helped to redefine the racial and ethnic profiles, not only of Italian Canadians, but of migrant populations as a whole.

With the work of Melfi, Cinelli, and Chiarilli, social memory, which had previously been something communities shared as a sort of 'existential possession' and 'inheritance' (Labelle and Midy 1999:215), has transformed into a 'collective symbolization' (Labelle and Midy 1999:217), i.e. a kind of social memory of the moment, which is generated when bonding between individuals takes place (Labelle and Midy 1999:217; Satzewich and Wong 2006; Schechner 2013). The marrying of the local with the global is implicit in this process, which can happen anywhere at any time, and which affects the cultural existences of playwrights, theatre practitioners, and their characters alike. This shift, first announced by Nino in Micone's *Déjà l'agonie*, becomes particularly evident in Cinelli's and Chiarilli's work, but it is Melfi's *Sex Therapy* that probably represents the conscious breakthrough. In Melfi's play, characters are alienated from a history that they revisit and reconstruct, while their past is redefined, dismembered even, and denuded of any ethnic label. The ethnic past in *Sex Therapy* is exposed as fake while the only possible bond remains the community, but it is *a* community, not necessarily Italian Canadian in essence. In the words of Melfi: 'I'm placing history where it is and always was but has not yet been divined.' (27 July 2011)

III

In exploring commonalities in the Italian Canadian theatre practices I have included in this research, it would be remiss if I did not address the penchant for discussing community. Where does community locate itself? Neither self nor universe is a sufficient standpoint for Italian Canadian plays in this thesis. Rather, the primary theatre material in this thesis positions itself *between* the self and the universe, so that

its stories document both individual and universal visions of community, and – most significantly – everything in between. The overwhelming question for Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners becomes this: how can they (or any other human being) work out the interconnections among the ever-widening declensions of community – self, family, society, the universe – presented in their plays? I think this diagram may help understand the variables at work when community is approached through the lens of Italian Canadian theatre:
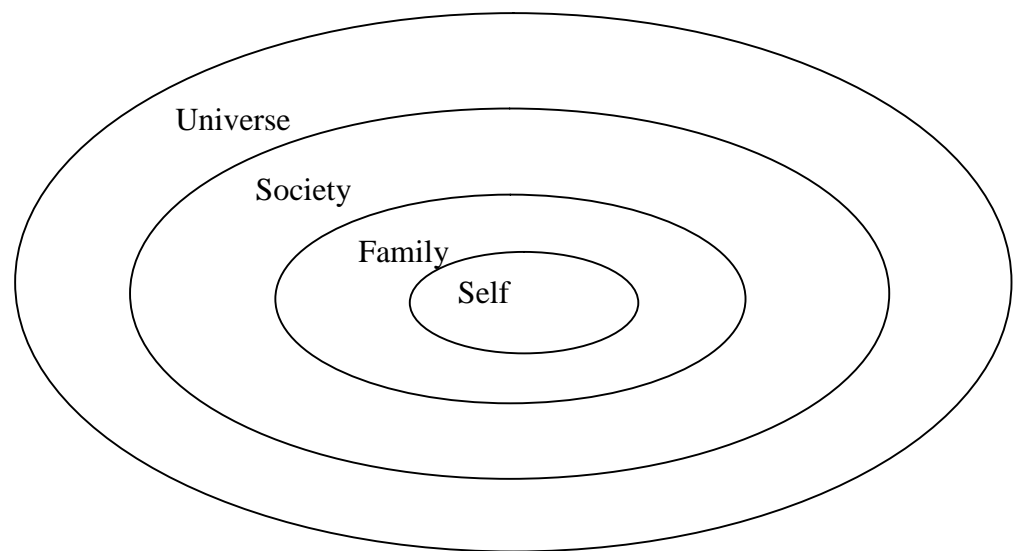
For the various Italian Canadian playwrights and theatre practitioners examined in this study, all of the circles are significant sources of community. All of their plays fret about the outside world and its relation to the self. By way of example, one persistent concern in Zanini's *The Executed Man* is reaching the outside circle. Compassion and mutual understanding help the immigrant protagonist come to terms with Canada, and the wedding, while projecting him towards a family-centred future, opens the play to the possibilities enabled by trusting the host society with which the newly-formed family is expected to interact.

This issue is explored further in Nardi's *La Storia*, Micone's *Gens du silence*, and Edward's *Homeground*. In these plays, reality has caught up with the myth of

Italian immigrant families, who sit happily around a table which is always set. To the public images of big weddings, family gatherings on the occasion of baptisms and other ceremonies, these plays oppose the problematic aspects of community as family: generational conflict between parents and children, the position of women, the treatment of the elderly. In *La Storia* and *Gens du silence*, Raffaele and Antonio are respectively seen as living only for their family. It is for their family that they violate wider social codes, but the point of the plays is that younger generations (notably Sal and Nancy) force their respective fathers to see their error, to recognise that the world does not stop at their doorstep. And at the climax of both plays, Raffaele and Antonio are driven to confront society, in its multiple definitions, and to face those elements – embodied by the Canadian world outside their home – which they see as a threat to the self. The community in *Homeground* is subject to similar dynamics, finding that its components must work from the inside out. Only at the end of the play do they discover who they are and what they want to be, and do they come to realise that they cannot function as individuals; rather, their existence is articulated within their relationships as a community of people. This will presumably lead them to recognise their wider responsibilities outside the confining walls of their boarding house.

The various declensions of community that are expressed in the theatre material for this thesis have led me to the conclusion that community, for Italian Canadians, mostly emerges from the ongoing rhythm of people's lives as a reflection of their social organisation and cultural values, which they tend to share even when they are being attacked. This seems to be the case of Piccolo Teatro as well as Porte Girevoli, Teatro degli Stracci and Melfi's *Sex Therapy*. In the various works analysed here, the self confronts his/her identity in a journey through the four circles of the diagram. By the time the show is over, a map has emerged for where the community is going in terms of identity, culture, and society. And, paradoxically, by reaching the outer 'universe'

circle, the plays also become more humanised in that multiple audiences can potentially relate to them.

IV

Italian Canadian ethnicity as explored in this thesis is a multifarious process resembling a kaleidoscope of loyalty, patriotism, and questioning of family, *paesani*, Italy, and Canada. The case studies presented in each of the thesis's three *Acts* show ethnicity as having the tendency to rotate around constantly changing forms of cultural identification. And just as the reflections in a kaleidoscope appear to spiral away from the centre, so too does Italian Canadian ethnicity as it flows in and out of its cultural cores according to socio-political demands and cultural dictates. Ethnicity is fluid and situational, and primarily based on consent rather than dissent.

Italian Canadian theatre also seems to portray ethnicity along a continuum, reflecting the human need to recognise oneself in a context beyond the self. It is precisely the primordial character of ethnicity that illuminates the path for an individual's journey through the ethnic landscape. Italian Canadianness emerges from this quest, but it is actualised in the process of exchange with other individuals, in the daily negotiation of their immigrant loyalties. Theatre becomes here the privileged medium through which their journey is told. As one of the main sources of unity for Italian immigrants before they left Italy, theatre configured itself in a similar way in Canada; and as it emerged in Canada it became, if anything, more a North American concept than an Italian one. However, the actual location of such work remained secondary to the fact that, no matter where it was created, it typically contained the 'affective qualities of home' by way of the plays' memories and materialities (Pivato 2007). Thus, Italian Canadian theatre in this thesis is ultimately a process that hinges upon the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names, and histories that have

been uprooted as a result of Italian immigrant experience*s* of both the recent and more distant past.

I am aware that concluding thoughts of this kind run the risk of presenting a programmatic view of Italian Canadian theatre. This has not been my intent. This thesis certainly does not purport to be a definitive history of Italian Canadian theatre; rather, it is something of a stock-taking exercise which suggests new departures. Research into Italian Canadian theatre has the potential to explore a range of dramatic texts that have not as yet been sufficiently surveyed – especially within the framework of a theatre history which is still emerging.[7] Yet to repeat one last time, Italian Canadian theatre cannot occur without taking into account the specific cultural history of an ethnic group, which provides the plays with their primary subjects and sources of inspiration.

In this sense, I suspect that, when one thinks about Italian Canadians today, the first images that come to mind are not those I have discussed here. Many Italian Canadian scholars are concerned that, despite the rich work of historical recovery being done in Italian Canadian studies, portrayals of Italian Canadians are still frequently overshadowed by stereotypes (Caccia 2002; D'Alfonso 1996; Iacovetta et al. 2000; Loriggio 2004; Losacco 2003; Padolsky 1997; Pivato 1996; Salvatore 1999; Sturino 1999). In themselves, these stereotypes serve as evidence of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have defined as 'invented tradition', i.e. 'a set of practices, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour […] which are foreign to a group […] automatically [implying] continuity with the past.' (1983:1) As part of an invented tradition, particularly in the way Canada and North America in general conceptualised Italian immigrants,[8] research around stereotypes might help develop a further

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[7] In a study of this kind, research never ends; there will always be one clue to follow or one more name to identify. The time has simply come when one must make the story known.

[8] This work often focuses on religious practices (see *Introduction*, p. 8, 'note 11') and Italian immigrants' associations with organised crime. In particular, the literature around mafia and its filmic representations has been the most prolific thus far (Ciongoli, A and J. Parini 1997;

perspective on the distinctive path that dominant stereotypical representations of Italian Canadians have followed and how those stereotypes have, for many, obscured genuine historical inquiry and understanding surrounding Italian Canadian history. Such studies already exist for poetry and prose (Fratta and Nardout-Lafarge 2003), but not for drama. Now that an attempt has been made here to survey the dramatic genre in relation to Italian Canadian theatre and Italian Canadians, further research analysing stereotypes may well follow upon this one, research comparing different play texts, different genres even. More is needed in terms of offering practical strategies to help use a solid knowledge of stereotypes to develop more nuanced readings of Italian Canadian texts, in which some set images are either absent or challenged. Of course, the mechanism should work both ways, and my thesis has addressed this in part.[9]

Similarly, other research possibilities might be offered by exploring the (un)conscious choices made by Canadian-born individuals of Italian descent as to the extent to which they persist as 'ethnic.' Plays by Steve Galluccio (1960-), Vittorio Rossi (1961-), and Lucia Frangione (1969-) might offer a solid case in point here.[10] Indeed,

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Gambino 2000; Tamburri 1998a; Viscusi 2006). Mostly a US product, the mafioso from *The Godfather* films or *The Sopranos* is a larger-than-life figure who has more in common with the American gangster hero than with the flesh-and-blood mafiosi that Italian politicians, intellectuals, and writers have so forcefully and courageously denounced (e.g. Borsellino and Falcone). In *La mafia spiegata ai miei figli* (2006; 'How to explain the mafia to my children'), the Sicilian writer Silvana La Spina writes that 'the Mafia is not merely an organisation, but a state of mind – fear, cowardice, indolence, and, of course, mistrust' (2006:100; translation mine). While La Spina urges young people to 'fight' for their survival against the Sicilian Mafia, and both *The Godfather* films and *The Sopranos* have been criticised by many for their stereotypical treatment of Italian immigrants (Gambino 2000; Tamburri 1998), North Americans of all ethnic backgrounds have been besotted with iconic Mafiosi (Ciongoli and Parini 1997). Such productions are also praised by others for their writing, acting, filming, directing and even, by some, for their contribution to Italian culture (especially Viscusi 2006). The Mafia is big business in entertainment industry globally (Viscusi 2006). But this business comes at a cost: the invented mafioso of American film and television – while having little relation to most Italians or Italian Canadians – has had significant detrimental effects on the emergence and recognition of a body of literature that could call itself Italian Canadian, and it has impeded (Salvatore 1999:28-34), and still impedes, a fuller and more complex appreciation of Italian Canadian literature as a whole.

[9] See above (p. 265-7), *Act I*, and *Act II*.

[10] For more on Montreal-born Vittorio Rossi and Steve Galluccio, see respectively: *Canadian Theatre* [Retrived from: http://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Rossi%2C%20Vittorio; last accessed October 2013]; *Talonbooks* [Retrieved from: http://talonbooks.com/authors/ steve-

people who leave their homeland to immigrate to a foreign country follow a course which affects their entire being, but how this change of state will suit their foreign-born offspring, who have not experienced immigration firsthand, may require a different framework altogether.

Notwithstanding, my study has hopefully served as a bridge into Italian Canadian theatre practices by both emerging and established Italian Canadian playwrights, theatre practitioners, and theatre groups. To achieve this, I have had to turn myself into another kind of bridge, determined both by the peculiarities of the theatre genre[11] and by Canada's paradoxical configuration; I have had to span a land that, for all its imposing expanse of territory, is fractured along several social and cultural as well as geographical lines. Trying to embrace the totality of Italian Canadian theatre would have been an impossible enterprise. The choices I have made are undeniably mine, but they have also been determined by moving in relatively uncharted territory. Perhaps the theatre and the 'Canada' to be seen here are not the theatre and the 'Canada' one might have expected to see; nor, for the most part, are the Italian Canadian protagonists of this thesis the ones who usually come to mind when thinking of 'Canada'. Yet if this is neither the theatre, nor the Canada, nor yet the people we are familiar with, then none of these are marginal, unless by marginal we mean that which we do not know.

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galluccio; last accessed October 2013] and Galluccio's official twitter account [Retrieved from: https://twitter.com/stevegalluccio; last accessed: October 2013]. For Vancouver-born Lucia Frangione, see *Playwrights Guild of Canada* [Retrieved from: http://www.playwrightsguild.ca/playwright/lucia-frangione; last accessed: October 2013].

[11] See *Introduction*, p. 1; p. 4; pp. 43-5.
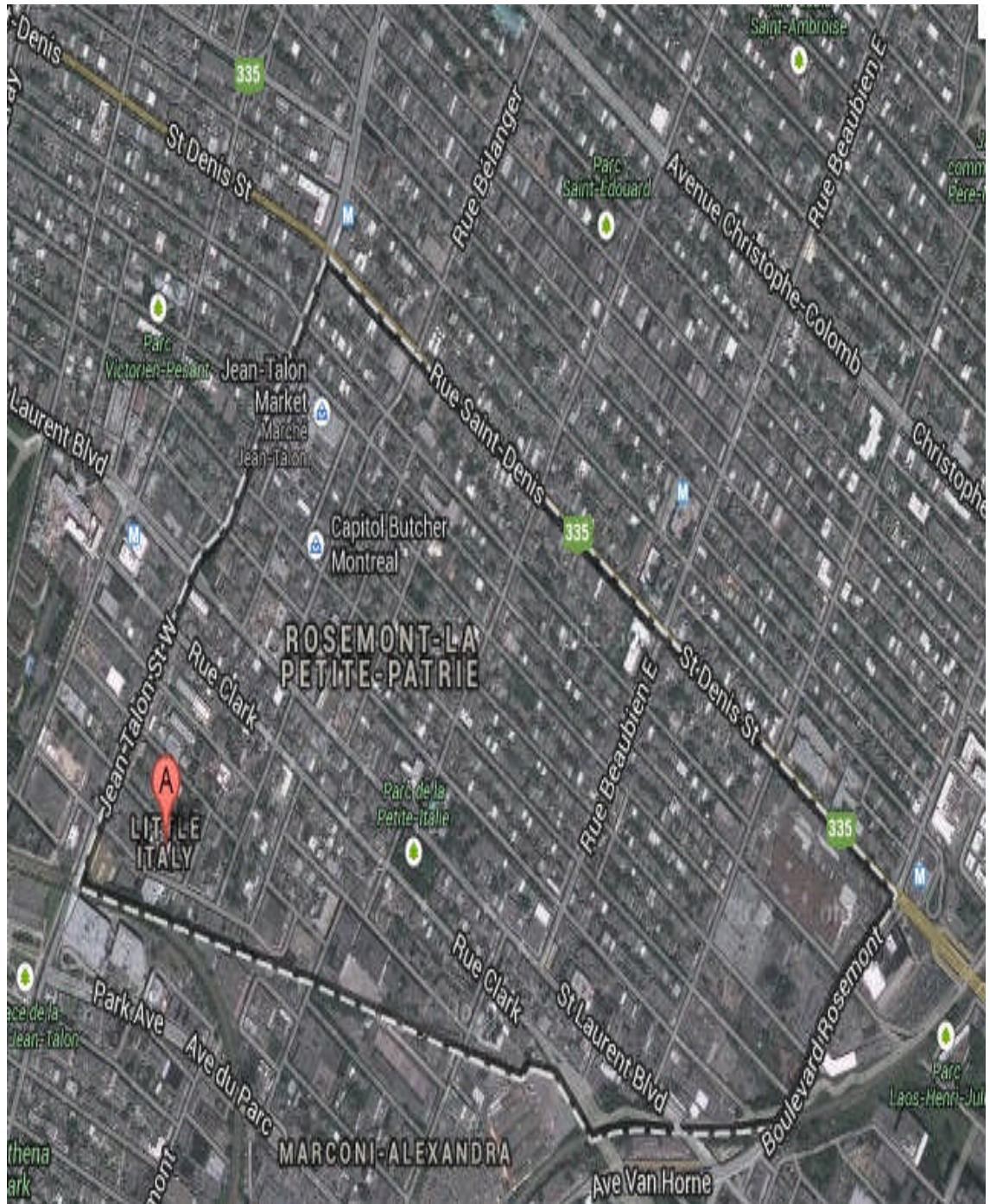
APPENDIX
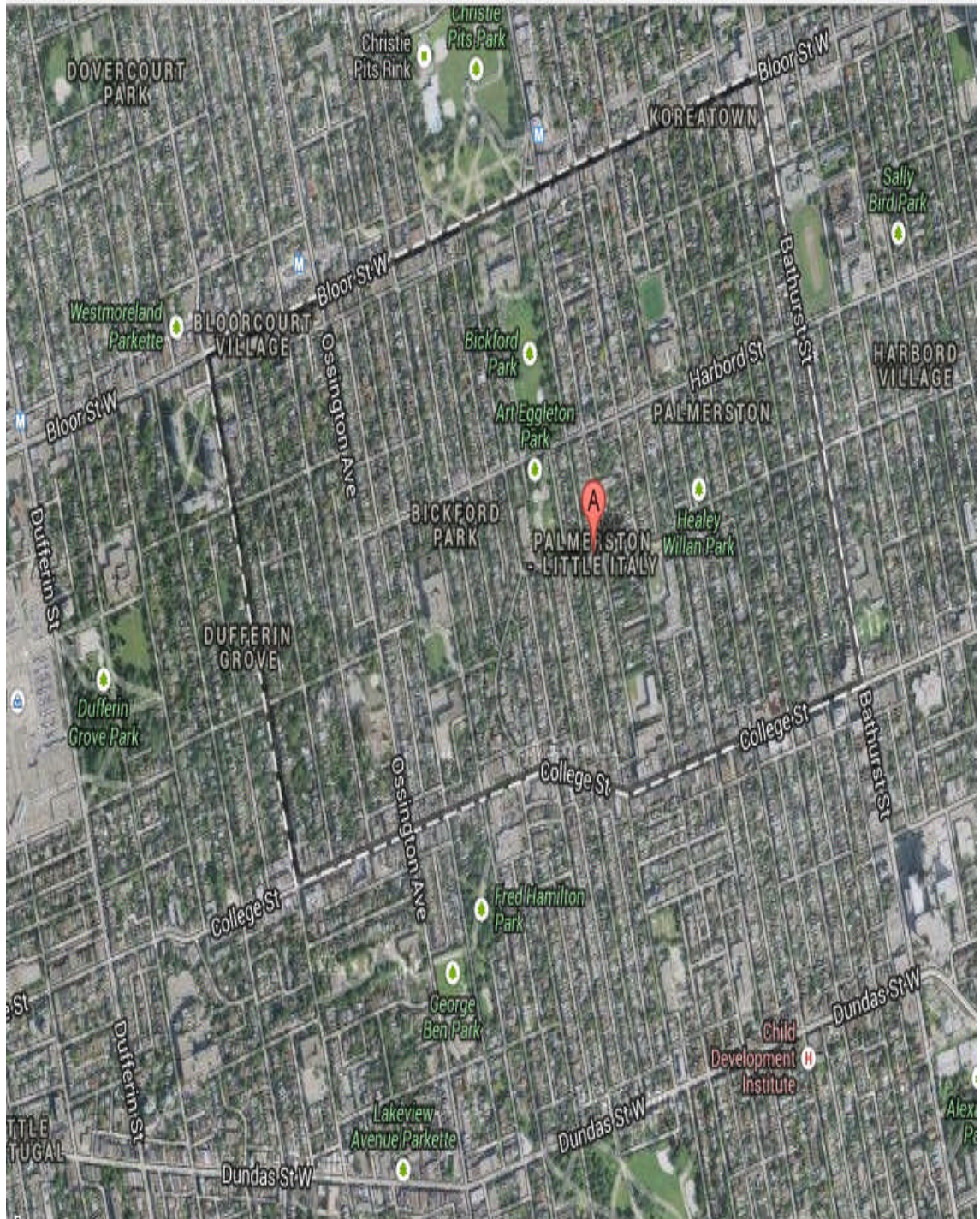
Map 1. *Toronto's Little Italy*.

Map 2. Montreal's *Little Italy*.

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