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# The Complex Italianità of Gianni Angelo Grohovaz

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Article abstract

Being Italian is not as simple or as straightforward as one might assume. For an Italian from the territories that Italy ceded to Yugoslavia in the wake of the Second World War, identifying as Italian, or to be seen as an Italian, was problematic, if not even dangerous. During and after the Second World War, most Italians from these territories abandoned their hometowns and became refugees in Italy. Some then emigrated overseas, where, for the most part, they continued to self-identify as Italians. This article looks at the Italian-Canadian author, radio personality, and activist Gianni Angelo Grohovaz, originally from Fiume (Italy), to determine what being Italian meant for him and how it conditioned his life and work.

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# THE COMPLEX *ITALIANITÀ* OF GIANNI ANGELO GROHOVAZ

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*Summary:* Being Italian is not as simple or as straightforward as one might assume. For an Italian from the territories that Italy ceded to Yugoslavia in the wake of the Second World War, identifying as Italian, or to be seen as an Italian, was problematic, if not even dangerous. During and after the Second World War, most Italians from these territories abandoned their hometowns and became refugees in Italy. Some then emigrated overseas, where, for the most part, they continued to self-identify as Italians. This article looks at the Italian-Canadian author, radio personality, and activist Gianni Angelo Grohovaz, originally from Fiume (Italy), to determine what being Italian meant for him and how it conditioned his life and work.

Gianni Angelo Grohovaz (1926–88) was adamantly Italian, proud of his roots in the city of Fiume (Italy) and of his service with the Alpini infantry corps of the Italian army. His *italianità* went unquestioned, but it came with the heavy burden of a troubled history. That's because Grohovaz was an exile from his hometown (1945),<sup>1</sup> a refugee in his own country (1945–50),<sup>2</sup> and an economic migrant to Canada (1950–88).<sup>3</sup> While in Canada, he worked assiduously in support of the local expatriate community of Italians as, among other things, a journalist, radio personality, writer, and labour activist. He was deeply engaged with various Italian associations and institutions such as the Alpini

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<sup>1</sup> Grohovaz remembers his departure from Fiume on 5 June 1945 in the poem “5 de giugno 1945” in Grohovaz, *Per ricordare*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> “5 anni e mezzo di ‘profuganza’ in Patria (fu uno dei primi a Fertilia dei Giuliani)” Anon., “La poesia di Gianni Grohovaz,” n.p. Grohovaz mentions his time in Fertilia working as a fisherman in the poem “Chi spuda in alto” in *Per ricordare*, 92, and includes it in his semi-autobiographical novel *Strada bianca*, 41–45.

<sup>3</sup> Grohovaz lived in Canada from his arrival on 8 December 1950 (Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 1; Grohovaz, “Toronto’s Italian Press,” 105), to his death at his cottage in Tiny Township, Ontario, on 14 May 1988; he is buried in Allenwood Cemetery, Allenwood, Simcoe County (near Wasaga Beach).

associations in Canada; the Famee Furlane club in Woodbridge, Ontario; the Club Giuliano Dalmato di Toronto; the Italo-Canadian Recreation Club on Brandon Avenue in Toronto,<sup>4</sup> which he directed for some years; the Piccolo Teatro Italiano that mounted some of his dramatic works;<sup>5</sup> the CHIN Radio station that for a while hosted his weekly radio show; the daily newspapers *Il Corriere Canadese*, to which he contributed many articles,<sup>6</sup> and the weekly newspapers *Panorama* and *Il Giornale di Toronto* (which he directed for some years).<sup>7</sup> In his years in Canada, Grohovaz not only worked actively in support of the local Italian community, aiming “to foster a sense of solidarity among Toronto’s Italians,”<sup>8</sup> but also to foster in the community a stronger sense of itself and of its role in, and contributions to, Canadian society. In 1974 his efforts to support and promote the Italian community in Canada led to his appointment as “Public Archives representative for the National Ethnic Archives of Canada.”<sup>9</sup> In short, Grohovaz was an early and strong voice for Italian immigrants and for Canadian multiculturalism, he was an important tessera in what was already coming to be known as the Canadian cultural mosaic.<sup>10</sup> Grohovaz’s self-awareness of his *italianità* and his militancy in favour of expatriate Italians in Canada, whose work and culture he deemed to be at risk, were natural by-products of who he was and where he came from.

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<sup>4</sup> See Grohovaz, “See You at Brandon Hall.” On the closing and sale of the Italo Canadian Recreational Club that met there, see Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 143–145.

<sup>5</sup> In 1962, for example, the Piccolo Teatro Italiano mounted Grohovaz’s *Il ragazzo del ’99*, a one-act play performed to commemorate Italian Memorial Day; the Italian ambassador and the consul general of Italy in Toronto were present in the hall that evening; Harney, “Immigration Theatre,” 52. On the Piccolo Teatro Italiano, see Grohovaz, “A Quest for Heritage”; Spezzano, *Il Piccolo teatro italiano*.

<sup>6</sup> On Grohovaz’s contribution to the early planning stages and his disappointment in not being involved in the publication of the first issues, see Grohovaz, “Toronto’s Italian Press,” 108–111.

<sup>7</sup> *Panorama* was founded in 1955 by Luigi Petrucci, recently arrived in Canada after a period in Columbia; Grohovaz, “Toronto’s Italian Press,” 111. *Il Giornale di Toronto* was founded by Aurelio Malvisi; on Malvisi, see Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 108–113.

<sup>8</sup> Baxa, “*La Festa della Fratellanza Italiana*,” 198.

<sup>9</sup> Grohovaz, *Strada bianca*, 95.

<sup>10</sup> The idea that Canada is a cultural mosaic (and not a melting pot, as is allegedly the case with the United States of America) was already voiced in the 1920s and 1930s by such writers as the Bermudan journalist Victoria Hayward (1876–1956), who is credited with coining the phrase, and the Scottish-Canadian writer John Murray Gibbon (1875–1952); see Day, *Multiculturalism*, 149–150.

### *An Italian in Fiume*

Grohovaz was born in Fiume, a city directly on the border between what were then the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The city was home to a majority Italian population and significant minorities of Slavs, Austrians, and Hungarians, not to mention a small Jewish population.<sup>11</sup> Though traditionally seen as a peaceful multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual city, there were ethnic tensions in town and in the area that tore at the social fabric and eventually exploded violently before, during, and immediately after the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> In a way, Grohovaz and his paternal family were both victims of, and survivors of these ethnic tensions; as his surname indicates, his family was of Hungarian origin, a group that, with the passage of Fiume to Italy in 1920, chose for the most part to abandon Fiume.<sup>13</sup> Grohovaz's father was not one of these; he remained in the city, and so his son, Gianni Angelo, was born and raised under Italian rule. Perhaps because of his family's deep roots in the city or the education (indoctrination) he received as a child, he self-identified as Italian in culture, language, and nationality.<sup>14</sup> His own and

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<sup>11</sup> The 1925 census (by Italy) gives the population of Fiume at 45,857 persons, of which 32,415 (71%) were identified as Italian, 10,353 (23%) as Croatian, 1,397 (3.1%) as Hungarian, 1,148 (2.5%) as Romanian, 655 (1.4%) as "German" (i.e., Austrian), 591 (1.3%) as Slovakian; Perselli, *I Censimenti*, 429. See also Patafta, "Promjene u nacionalnoj strukturi," 699, which gives slightly different population figures, but similar percentages. On the small but important Jewish population in Fiume before the Second World War, see Bon, "Le comunità ebraiche."

<sup>12</sup> Stelli, *Storia di Fiume*, 261–308. More generally, Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed*, 12–16 and passim.

<sup>13</sup> The Austrian census figures indicate that in 1918 there were 4,431 Hungarians in Fiume (9.6% of the total population); by 1925, that figure had dropped to only 1,397 (3.1%); Patafta, "Promjene u nacionalnoj strukturi," 699.

<sup>14</sup> Massimiliano Grohovaz, who has conducted extensive genealogical research on his family, writes that the family name is apparently of Hungarian origin and that a branch of the family was in Fiume already at the end of the fifteenth century: "Il cognome Grohovaz sembra derivi dall'ungherese Grahovac. Nei primi del 1300 si ha evidenza dei primi Grahovac nei territori dell'odierna Slovacchia. Nella metà del 1300 sono presenti anche nell'odierna Bosnia e Croazia. Fondarono tra la fine del 1300 e inizio 1400 la città Montenegro di Grahovac, vicino alla fortezza di Ostrvica, dove combatterono ma vennero annessi all'impero Ottomano nel 1451. Da lì qualcuno si spostò a Fiume/Rijeka e altri fondarono Grohovo dove sono registrate attività e possedimenti della famiglia già alla fine del 1400." See Massimiliano Grohovaz, "L'origine del cognome Grohovaz e la sua storia."

Fiume's *italianità* and multiculturalism were thus an integral part of who Grohovaz was and how he saw himself and the world.

In the poem “Amor de bestie, odio de cristiani” (Animals’ love, people’s hatred), written in Fiuman dialect,<sup>15</sup> Grohovaz remembers in idyllic terms the peaceful cohabitation of Italian, Slavic, and Germanic ethnicities in the multicultural context of the Fiume of his youth. In the poem, he describes how the three family pets (a dog, a cat, a canary) got along well with each other. The dog slept by the fireplace, the cat licked his ears, and the canary rested on the dog’s head, nestling between the folds of his skin. Gianni’s mother would throw some cherries to the bird, who pecked them a little and then passed them to the cat, who licked them a little and then passed them to the dog, who, in turn, chewed them a little and then spat out the pits.

Amor de bestie, odio de cristiani

Giulieto, el canarin de casa nostra,  
 col can e ’l gato andava assai d’acordo:  
 el Grom dormiva soto al fogoler  
 la gata ghe lavava anca le orece  
 mentre l’usel el se fazeva el nido  
 tra le pieghe de la pele in testa al can ...  
 Mia mama ghe butava le zeriese:  
 l’usel becava un poco, e poi el lassava  
 che la gata ghe dassi una lecada.  
 El can, ciapava la zeriesa,  
 la mastigava un poco, e spudà l’osso  
 tornava pacifico a dormir ...  
 E noi cristiani ... non capimo un’acca:  
 che le zeriese, spartirsele bisogna!  
 Perché le flicche, i bori e le agiateze  
 non poderemo portarse drio domani

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<sup>15</sup> All the poems in the collection *Per ricordar le cose che ricordo* are in Fiuman dialect, one of the dialects of the larger Venetian linguistic family. In the “Presentazione” to the book, Grohovaz points out the importance of recording his memories in dialect, even if his rendering of the dialect is not linguistically accurate enough (in fact, he mentions that the title should read “le robe” and not “le cose”) and then adds that it is an *idiomicio* (the killing of a language) not to pass to future generations “some crumbs of our yesterdays” (“qualche fregola del nostro ieri”; 10). For more on Grohovaz’s use of dialect see below, pp. 35–37.

quando el becchin se spuderà le mani  
per meter soto tera i nostri ossi.<sup>16</sup>

(Animals' love, people's hate<sup>17</sup> /// Giulieto, the canary at our house / With the dog and cat got along well: / Grom would sleep under the fireplace / The cat would even wash his ears / While the bird made a nest for himself / Among the folds on the dog's head ... / My mom would throw a few cherries at them: / The bird picked at them a bit, and then let / The cat give them a lick. / The dog would grab the cherry, / Chew it a bit and, having spat out the pit, / Would go back, peacefully, to sleep ... / And we, human beings ... we don't understand anything: / Cherries are meant to be shared! / Because the pennies, money, and easy living / We won't be able to take with us tomorrow / When the gravedigger will spit on his hands / Before putting our bones into the ground.)

A similar allegory is presented in "L'orologio de la tore" (The tower clock), a poem that describes the meeting of the Italian mayor (*podestà*) of Fiume with his counterpart from Sussak (Sušak), the Yugoslavian town on the other side of the River Eneo (Rječina). The two mayors meet to talk about "the problem of too much contraband," all the while gifting each other with various foodstuffs – coffee and sugar from the Italian to the Yugoslav, smoked prosciutto, Bosnian wine, and *rakija* from the Yugoslav to the Italian.<sup>18</sup> In Grohovaz's poetic recollection of cross-border relations, tensions between the two municipalities and countries are easily resolved with a mid-morning meeting of first citizens and a generous exchange of gifts that borders on the contraband the two men are trying, at least officially, to prevent.

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<sup>16</sup> Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 8. Here and henceforth all translations are mine.

<sup>17</sup> The term *cristiani* is used by Grohovaz not to refer specifically to Christians, but to people in general, hence my translation. This use of the term was (and in some cases still is) common not only in Italian dialects from north to south but also in Italian; the *Dizionario Treccani*, for example, gives the following as one of its meanings: "Nel linguaggio fam. è usato come sinon. di *uomo*, cioè essere umano (spesso con tono di compassione o di benevolenza)." The practice is quite ancient; the 1612 edition of the *Dizionario della Crusca* says that the term means "per proprietà di linguaggio, vale qualche volta huomo semplicemente. ma in istil basso" and gives an example from Francesco Berni's poetry.

<sup>18</sup> Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 51–53.

In Grohovaz's view, this idyllic world came to an end in 1945 with the takeover of the city by the national-communist partisans of Marshal Josip Broz "Tito" and the intestinal hatred they induced (in Grohovaz's view) in the local population, a fratricidal anger that destroyed the "family" that was Fiume.<sup>19</sup> At this point Grohovaz left the city, as did the vast majority of the population, and went into exile in Italy.

### *A Refugee in Italy*

Grohovaz's five and a half years as a refugee in Italy are not well documented and so have not been studied. The best insight we can have into them at the moment is to extract a possible scenario from the passages in his autobiographical novel *Strada bianca*, in which the narrator/protagonist, Ivan Del Conte, describes what he experienced after leaving Fiume and becoming a homeless refugee in Italy.

At a certain point in the narrative, Ivan describes how he was picked up on the street, arrested and jailed on the suspicion that he had been a Fascist. He is soon released thanks to the intervention of a group of ex-Fascists who mistake him for a namesake of his who had taken part in a firing squad that executed fourteen men by shooting them in the back. Once Ivan realizes who the people who freed him are, how they truly believe he is his namesake, and how they plan to use him to achieve their anti-democratic goals, he responds with a long invective against them that begins with the following:

I am a free man, I have unjustly suffered hunger and imprisonment. By saving me, you have done nothing but confirm the absurd charges leveled against me and now, in exchange for the bread you gave me, you want my blood and my destruction. You declare yourselves to be everyone's friend, you use the party to extend your hand to everyone and you ask for forgiveness or you distribute forgiveness, but then you use the action squads to stab people in the back and continue this fratricidal struggle.

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<sup>19</sup> For the poems describing the Yugoslav takeover of Fiume and the violence wrought on the local Italian population, see Grohovaz's poems "Bufera," "E ti Fiume, povero Cristo ...," "Seconda ondata," "Ma ... se lo dixe anca la Bibia," and "5 giugno 1945" in Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 15–26.

I have forgiven, but you do not know how to forgive. You think you are above everyone else because you have enough gold to be able to buy even a place in Heaven. You claim to help those afflicted by political gangrene, but in fact you push those poor people to lose even their souls. By your actions you demean the mind of the Nation and betray the will of the Dead. I cannot justify violence, no matter who calls for it.<sup>20</sup>

It may well be that, with the narration of this episode, Grohovaz was trying to free himself from the suspicion of being a Fascist, a suspicion that was sometimes raised against Italian refugees from Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia.<sup>21</sup> What is more relevant to our analysis, however, is the idea that in Italy Grohovaz had to contend with the suspicion that his *italianità* was tainted by his alleged adherence to Fascist ideals. In fact, the political and social climate in post-war Italy was such that Italian refugees in general and the various associations they soon created to hold their expatriate communities together and protect them were often seen as crypto-fascist or irridentist. It would take fifty years for the Italian government to finally acknowledge in full the extent of the tragedy of the Italian exodus and the ethnic cleansing of Italians carried out by Yugoslav forces in the 1940s, finally liberating their *italianità* from the suspicion of covert Fascism.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Io sono un uomo libero, ho patito ingiustamente fame e galera. Voi salvandomi, non avete fatto altro che confermare gli assurdi capi d'accusa nei miei confronti ed ora in cambio del pane che mi avete dato, volete il mio sangue e la mia distruzione. Sospettavo le vostre trame, ma non avrei mai creduto che giungeste a tanto per uno sporco interesse. Dichiarandovi amici di tutti vi servite del partito per stendere la mano a tutti chiedendo perdono o distribuendo perdono, ma poi vi servite delle squadre d'azione per pugnalarle alle spalle la gente e continuare la lotta fratricida. // Io ho perdonato, ma voi non sapete perdonare, vi credete di essere al di sopra di tutti perché avete l'oro per potervi comprare persino un posto in Paradiso, voi sostenete di aiutare gli afflitti da cancrena politica, in verità spingete quei poveracci a perdere anche la loro anima. Con le vostre azioni avvilita la mente della Nazione e tradite il testamento dei Morti. Io non posso giustificare la violenza, non importa da chi essa venga invocata.” Grohovaz, *Strada bianca*, 34–35.

<sup>21</sup> There is plenty of evidence, scholarship, literature, and personal narratives that speak of the assumption on the part of some peninsular Italians and especially of members and leaders of the Italian Communist Party that all refugees from the territories ceded to Yugoslavia were Fascists fleeing from justice; see Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed*, 119–120.

<sup>22</sup> The full acknowledgement came with the Italian government's law of 30 March 2004 that established 10 February as the “Giorno del Ricordo,” the national day of



*An Immigrant in Canada*

After a brief stay in refugee camps in Italy, Grohovaz emigrated to Canada where, twenty years after his arrival, he realized that, in the end, Fiume and Canada were very similar. In his view, both brought together the most diverse people and made them participants in a future of peace and mutual respect that coloured the cosmopolitan, multicultural, multilingual, and progressive reality that he saw operating in the two places. At this point, Grohovaz realized that Canada was very much like his hometown of Fiume and that the two were not so different after all.

Chi mai gavessi deto? Fiume e Canadà ...

Giogandone, in Cava del Rùbinich,  
 a volte se fazeva i canadesi,  
 per via de quel ... (non me ricordo el nome):  
 un tipo bravo, che su “L’Aventuroso”  
 portava sempre in cheba el malandrin.  
 Jera cussì lontan questo Paese  
 che su l’atlante de scola,  
 la pagina che mostra el Canadà  
 xe ancora nova!  
 Savevimo che el jera un posto fredo,  
 gnente de più però,  
 anzi, pensando se tratasse de un Dominio  
 credevimo che el fossi in schiavitù!  
 Mai più gavessi mi pensado:  
 “un de ’sti giorni,  
 me ingrumo su le strazze e vado là”!  
 Ma el ribalton e l’Italia calabraghe  
 me ga sburtà de ’ndar in giro al mondo.  
 Ecome quà, e devo dir che in fondo in fondo  
 el Canadà, con tuti i suoi difeti  
 el gà qualcosa che me piaxe molto.  
 Per questo xe vent’ani che son quà.

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remembrance of the tragedy of the *foibe* and the exodus of the Italian population from Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia.

El ghe somiglia come un soldo falso  
a Fiume nostra (ma no in fisonomia)  
solo l'anagrafe gavemo tale e qual.  
Xe fazile a viver in 'sto paese  
(per chi che xe de Fiume, se capisse),  
perché anca quà xe zente de ogni sorte:  
tute le raze, cento religion,  
setantazinque lingue (e opinion).  
Però manca qualcosa: El Franzelin, ad esempio  
(quel che coreva drio tamburi e bande  
e poi, con rabia se morsigava el brazo  
perché la banda non sonava più ...).  
Ne manca l'orologio de la Tore,  
(no i sona gnanca al Vespro le campane!)  
... e no i ga gnanca un buso per madame ...  
Xe fazile per noi, veci fiumani,  
viver coi gregghi, coi russi e coi zulù,  
perché anca a Fiume jera i ungheresi,  
i gnochì, ostrogoti e ... perfin cinesi:  
in Braida, "clavàte" el sbagazava  
el vecio Wan-Fan-Cu che da Pechino  
jera vegnudo a Fiume a far fortuna ...  
Andavimo d'acordo (come anca quà)  
fin quando tuti i ospiti stranieri  
no i ne tocava el cul o la bandiera ...  
Chi mai gavessi dito? Fiume e Canadà  
in fondo in fondo ga molte afinità.  
Come le done, proprio:  
quando ghe meto sul viso un sugaman  
xe poca diferenza tra de lore;  
ma quando el sugaman ghe cavo via  
poco me resta, o gnente, Fiume mia ...<sup>23</sup>

(Whoever would have said it? Fiume and Canada ... /// When we played in Rubinich's quarry / sometimes we played at being Canadian / on account of that ... (I don't remember his name), / a

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<sup>23</sup> Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 31-33.

brave fellow who, in the *Aventuroso*, / always got the crook and  
 jailed him up. / This Country was so far away / that on the school  
 atlas / the page that showed Canada / was still new! / We knew  
 it was a cold place, / but nothing more, / in fact, thinking it was  
 a Dominion / we thought it was enslaved! / I never would have  
 thought: / “one of these days, / I’ll gather up my rags and I’ll go  
 there”! / But the reversal and lower-your-pants Italy / pushed  
 me out to wander in the world. / Here I am, and I must say that  
 in the end / Canada, with all its flaws, / has something that I  
 like very much. / That’s why I’ve been here for twenty years. / It  
 resembles, like a false coin, / our Fiume (though not in appear-  
 ance) / only the vital statistics are the same. / It’s easy to live in  
 this country / (for those who come from Fiume, of course), / be-  
 cause here, too, there’s people of all sorts: / all races, a hundred  
 religions, / seventy-five languages (and opinions). / But some-  
 thing is missing: Franzelin, for example, / (the guy who chased  
 after drums and bands / and then angrily bit his arm / when  
 the band no longer played ...). / We don’t have the clock on the  
 Tower, / (they don’t ring the bells even at Vespers!) / ... and they  
 don’t even have a hole for ladies ... / It’s easy for us, old Fiu-  
 mans, / to live with Greeks, Russians, and Zulus, / because in Fi-  
 ume, too, we had Hungarians, / Krauts, Ostrogoths, and ... even  
 Chinese: / old Wan-Fan-Cu, who had come / to Fiume from Bei-  
 jing to make his fortune, / sold “clavàte” down in Braida ... / We  
 got along (just like here) / as long as our foreign guests / did not  
 touch our ass or the flag .. / Whoever would have said it? Fiume  
 and Canada / in the end have many things in common. / Just as  
 women do: / when I put a towel over their face / there is little dif-  
 ference between them; / but when I take the towel away / I’m left  
 with little or nothing, my Fiume ...)

The conclusion might suggest that Grohovaz is speaking ironically, but this is not the case; in a footnote comment at the end of the poem, he observes:

I don’t know if it’s a virtue or a fault, the fact is that between Canada and Fiume there are a few things that go together like clockwork. Look at our dialect, full of words borrowed from:

Italians, Hungarians, Slavs, French, Turks and Krauts. Just as it was in Fiume, whoever comes to Canada comes here to stay.<sup>24</sup>

So it is with Grohovaz, who sinks his Fiuman-Italian roots in Canada, never to expatriate again. Even if Fiume were to call, Grohovaz would not return.<sup>25</sup> In Canada Grohovaz found his *italianità fiumana* – a complex and sometimes difficult identity built on a strong sense of being Italian, but also open to other cultures, and aware of just how endangered that identity actually was.

### **Grohovaz's Italianità**

Grohovaz's *italianità* was not, however, an easy load to bear. The fact that he was not an economic migrant free to return to his hometown in Italy but a refugee unable to return to his native place now under foreign control was a heavy burden. In his radio talk of 10 December 1980, the thirtieth anniversary of his arrival in Canada, Grohovaz first presents himself as a deported person, just like so many other post-Second World War refugees immigrating to Canada:

30 years ago, on December 8 at eight o'clock in the morning, I and 450 other refugees from the most disparate corners of a devastated Europe disembarked in Halifax from the Hellenic barge, the motor vessel *Olympia*, that ship that before and after our Atlantic crossing brought rivers of humanity to Canada in search of new illusions.

We were D.P.s then.<sup>26</sup>

Later in that same talk, Grohovaz describes his thirty years in Canada as an "adventure":

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<sup>24</sup> "Non so se sia un pregio opur un difeto, fato sta che tra el Canada e Fiume xe qualche cossa che fila come l'ojo. Guardè el nostro dialeto, pien de parole ciolte in prestito da: taliani, ungheresi, slavi, francesi, turchi e gnochì. Cussì come jera a Fiume, chi vien in Canada vien qua per restar." Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> On this topic, see Eisenbichler, "And if Fiume Were to Call?"

<sup>26</sup> "Infatti, 30 anni fa, l'otto dicembre alle otto del mattino, io ed altri 450 profughi provenienti dai più disparati angoli dell'Europa sconquassata, sbarcammo ad Halifax dalla carretta ellenica, la motonave *Olympia*, quella nave che prima e dopo la nostra traversata atlantica ha portato in Canada fiumi di umanità in cerca di nuove illusioni.

Eravamo D.P.s allora." Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 1.

It is an adventure that has lasted thirty years! And no one can arrogate to himself the right to silence me ... no one can tell me: if you don't like it, go home: because I have no home, my homeland is the world, and my only mortgage is the great love I have for my fellow man.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that, as a refugee, he could no longer return to his hometown loomed large in Grohovaz's mind and heart. In his radio talk of 24 June 1981, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, he is overcome by nostalgia for his lost city of Fiume, the city's celebrations for the saint, and the bowl of *pasta e fagioli* that his mother traditionally made on that day:

[...] nostalgia for one's native country is such a dreadful disease [...]. And the years come and go, and you feel more and more attached to the homeland that is so far away. [...] I haven't seen Fiume in 36 years ... and only the old photographs – yellowed by time – tell me a truth that no longer exists.

Modern postcards show me a country that is not mine, that does not smell of mother's milk or grandfather's cigar, or violets. Asphalt and foreign flags cover the meadows of my imagination and my sky over Fiume. Like a wandering Jew I roam through the streets of the world in search of a homeland that no longer exists because it has been obliterated by racial hatred.<sup>28</sup>

Nostalgia for his hometown and bitterness over the transfer of his city to Yugoslavia complicated Grohovaz's relationship with Italy. In the wake of

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<sup>27</sup> “È un'avventura che dura da trent'anni! e nessuno può arrogarsi il diritto di mettermi a tacere ... nessuno può dirmi: se non ti piace, vattene a casa tua: perché io non ho casa, la mia patria è il mondo, e la mia unica ipoteca è il grande amore che nutro per il mio prossimo.” Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> “[...] che brutto male la nostalgia del paese natio ... [...] E gli anni passano, e sempre più ci si sente attaccati alla terra natia che è così lontana. [...] son 36 anni che non rivedo Fiume ... e solo le vecchie fotografie – ingiallite dal tempo – mi dicono una verità che non c'è più.

Le cartoline moderne mi mostrano un paese che non è il mio, che non odora di latte di mamma o del sigaro del nonno, o di violette. Asfalto e bandiere forestiere coprono a Fiume i prati della mia fantasia ed il mio cielo. Come un ebreo errante vago per le vie del mondo in cerca di una patria che non c'è più perché obliterata dall'odio di razza.” Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 90–91.

the Treaty of Osimo,<sup>29</sup> Grohovaz began to see Italy not as his mother but as his stepmother, and himself not as the beloved son but as the unwanted stepson expelled from the family unit. In the preface to the second edition of *Per ricordare le cose che ricordo* (September 1976), which appeared just under a year after the Treaty of Osimo, Grohovaz added a prefatory poem that voiced his anger at Italy and his sense of having been betrayed:

Io ti ripago: Italia senza core

Io ti ripago Italia “boteghera”,  
pavida, rinunciatrice, e “calabraghe”  
che senza arrossire di vergogna  
hai ceduto la mia terra a Tito.  
L’Istria bella, italiana e mia  
è diventata oggetto di baratto ...

Due volte son partito via in esilio,  
due volte ho dovuto pagar caro  
il mio amore per l’Istria e per l’Italia,  
... per questa Matrigna che al Governo  
fa a pezzi lo Stival finquando, ahinoi!  
dell’Italia di Vittorio del ’18  
non rimarrà che una ciabatta rotta!  
Vergogna!

Ma ti ripago, Matrigna senza core  
perché impunita non rimanga nella Storia  
la Tua doppia faccia, impenitente!  
Se gli Slavi han ricevuto per regalo  
la Zona B e la mia Terra amata,  
anch’io voglio donar loro qualcosa!

Tanto, mio nonno non riposa;  
per l’insulto si rigira nella fossa:

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<sup>29</sup> By signing the Treaty of Osimo (10 November 1975), Italy accepted the temporary post-war border between the two countries as a permanent border and relinquished any future claim to the Italian territories Yugoslavia had conquered during the war, including the city of Fiume.

ha sofferto per nulla e non ha pace ...  
 Sul Carso, sul Piave e a Caporetto,  
 a Santa Gorizia, sui monti e giù in trincea  
 quel ch'Egli ha fatto per unir l'Italia  
 non conta più nulla, anzi è un delitto!

Guarda Matrigna quel che io faccio:  
 con la Medaglia d'Oro (che ormai è 'no scherzo)  
 e con la Croce del Cavalierato,  
 che per mio Nonno volean dir tutto,  
 più della vita stessa perché ingannato  
 pensava che Tu eri sincera, Italia d'oggi:  
 mi faccio una risata,  
 amara se vuoi, ma una risata ...

Delle sue glorie, mio Nonno volontario,  
 mi fece erede, e gli fui grato  
 perché credevo in Te, anch'io t'amavo  
 come solo un Istriano lo sa fare ...  
 Ora?  
 Non t'odio, perché anche questo è un sentimento;  
 non t'amo perché hai giocato il tradimento!  
 La Tua infingardia me la lego al dito  
 e, Nonno perdonami,  
 le Tue medaglie le regalo a Tito!<sup>30</sup>

(I pay you back: heartless Italy /// I pay you pack, “shop-keeper”  
 Italy, / timid, renunciate, and “lower-your-pants” / who, with-  
 out blushing from shame, / give up my land to Tito. / Beautiful  
 Istria, Italian and mine, / has become something to barter ... //  
 Twice I went away into exile, / twice I had to pay dearly / my love  
 for Istria and for Italy, / ... for this Stepmother whose Govern-  
 ment / rips the Boot to pieces until, poor us! / the Italy of 1918 at  
 Vittorio [Veneto] / will be left a broken slipper. / Shame! // But  
 I pay you back, heartless Stepmother, / so that Your unrepent-  
 ant double-face / won't remain unpunished in History! / If the

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<sup>30</sup> Grohovaz, *Per ricordar* (1976), 4-5.

Slavs have received Zone B / and my beloved Land as a gift, / I, too, want to give them something! // In any case, my grandfather cannot rest: / he's turning in his grave for this offence: / he suffered for nothing and finds no peace ... / What He did on the Carso, by the Piave, / at Caporetto, at Santa Gorizia, on the mountains, / down in the trenches to unite Italy / now counts for nothing, indeed it's a crime! // Look, Stepmother, what I do / with the Gold Medal (that is now a joke) / and with the Cross of his Knighthood / that meant everything to my grandfather, / more than life itself because, deceived, / he thought you were sincere, Italy of today: / I laugh at all of this, / a bitter laugh, if you want, but a laugh ... // My volunteer Grandfather made me heir / to his glories, and I was grateful to him / because I believed in You, I, too, loved you / as only an Istrian can love ... / Now? / I don't hate you, because this, too, is a feeling; / I don't love you because you betrayed us! / I tie Your laziness to my finger / and, Grandpa forgive me, / I'll give Your medals to Tito!

The poem is not among the most polished, but its spontaneity clearly reveals the deep pain inherent in the identity crisis that the Italian exile from Fiume suffers when Italy gives the city away to Yugoslavia and abandons its people. Ironically, even before the signing of this treaty, Fiuman exiles who emigrated abroad found that at their arrival in their new country they suddenly lost their *italianità* and were being identified and categorized by the local immigration authorities as Yugoslavs, not as Italians, because they were born in towns that, like Fiume, had in the meantime become part of Yugoslavia.<sup>31</sup>

Grohovaz's *italianità* is thus undermined not only by his native country, Italy, but also by his host country, Canada. In the preface to his collection of poetry, Grohovaz writes, "here they call me John Angelo Grohovaz."<sup>32</sup> In Canada, the Italian Gianni has become the Canadian John and lost part of his Italian identity. Admittedly, this aspect of integration into the host society

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this misidentification of Italian immigrants from Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia, see Eisenbichler, "I Giuliano-Dalmati in Canada," 33–35; Eisenbichler, "Italian Refugees in Canada," 80. For a personal recollection of that misidentification and the long-term repercussions it had for Julian-Dalmatian exiles in Canada, see Bongiovanni, "La memoria di chi eravamo."

<sup>32</sup> "qua i me chiama / John Angelo Grohovaz"; Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 11.



that leads to a name change was already present in Grohovaz's family: though Hungarian by origin, they had accepted and blended into the dominant Italian culture of Fiume so much so that, in the 1920s, they gave their son an Italian name, not a Hungarian one: Giovanni, not János.

Despite Grohovaz's adjustment to, and integration into the dominant English culture of Toronto, he continued to self-identify as an Italian exile and lament the dispersal suffered by his fellow Fiumani. The poem "Profughi" (Refugees) speaks of the geographical and cultural dispersal of the Italian population from Fiume and underlines the physical distance that now separates them not only from their native city but also from each other. It also alludes to the social degradation and to the condition of servitude that this population must endure in foreign lands:

### Profughi

La mula xe partida per l'Australia  
 el mulo per l'America Latina ...  
 Dopo la guera tuto xe cambiato  
 xe andà in malora patria e religion ...  
 La gente che partiva per l'Italia  
 credeva che i andava via in vacanza:  
 i veci soli, senza più speranza  
 i morti i salutava a San Micel.  
 Infatti, in zimitero de Cosala,  
 le none se incontrava dopopranzo:  
 de fiori in brazo un mazzo pei defunti  
 ... na lagrima ... la croxe ... 'na careza ...  
 "Dove la va ... signora Erminia?" "A Napoli!  
 e lei?" "Go un fio a Venezia ..."  
 "ma varda che tristeza  
 lassar i morti indrio me pianze el cor ..."  
 Le strazze in do' fagoti, la valigia  
 ligà col spago, e un mucio de pensier,  
 l'esule parte per el lungo esilio  
 lassando drio de sè el suo fogoler ...  
 Milano, Chiavari, Venezia o in Furlania  
 in campi profughi ... altro ché Calvario ...  
 xe zente che domanda a Dio un pocheto

de paze ... de lavor ... de rispetto ...  
Macché!? xe roba vecia, messa su in sofità,  
tra i strafanici che non serve più ...  
La prima tappa, e poi xe vegnù l'IRO  
e in giro al mondo semo in servitù ...  
La mula fa la serva xò in Australia,  
el mulo scava busi nel Perù ...<sup>33</sup>

(Refugees /// The girl left for Australia / the guy for Latin America ... / After the war everything changed / country and religion went to ruin ... / The people leaving for Italy / thought they were going away on holidays: / the elderly, alone, with no hope left / visited the dead in San Micel. / In fact, in the cemetery in Cosala, / grandmothers met after lunch: / some flowers for the dead in hand / ... a tear ... the sign of the cross ... a caress ... / "Where will you go ... Signora Erminia?" "To Naples! / and you?" "I have a son in Venice ..." / "This is so sad, / it breaks my heart to leave the dead behind ..." / Two bundles of rags, a suitcase / tied with rope, a heap of worries, / the exile leaves for the long exile / leaving his home behind him ... / Milan, Chiavari, Venice, or in Friuli / in refugee camps ... what an ordeal ... / they are people who ask God for a bit / of peace ... of work .. of respect ... / Not at all!? It's old things, put up in the attic, / among the rags that are no longer needed ... / The fist leg, and then came the I.R.O. / and we're around the world in servitude ... / The girl is a maid down in Australia, / the guy is digging holes in Peru ...)

In the young man digging holes in Peru we catch an allusion to the young Gianni Angelo Grohovaz who, having arrived in Canada, went to work as a lumberjack in the forests of northern Ontario and then undertook various other jobs in order to survive.<sup>34</sup> In a speech delivered on 8 February 1984

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<sup>33</sup> Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 27–28.

<sup>34</sup> For Grohovaz's work experience as a recent immigrant to Canada, see his semi-autobiographical novel *Strada bianca*, which he composed in 1952 and was preparing for publication in 1988 when he died of a heart attack; the novel was then published posthumously by a group of his friends and admirers that consisted of Tino Baxa, Carletto Caccia, Alberto De Rosa, Pal Di Iulio, Alceo Lini, Carlo Milessa, Armand Scaini, and Nereo Serdoz.

to members of the Italian club at (then) Erindale College at the University of Toronto, Grohovaz explained:

Then they ask me what I do for a living. Well, modesty aside, I've always listened to my father who kept telling me: learn the art and set it aside ... And so in Italy I was a bank clerk, a soldier, a warehouseman, a typist, a journalist, an educator, a fisherman, and a porter. In Canada, it gets more complicated: lumberjack, railwayman, accountant, interpreter, cement worker, carpenter, mechanic, dishwasher, car washer, electrician's assistant, social worker, administrator, business manager, personnel manager, assistant manager and editor-in-chief, night watchman, club manager, assistant dairy manager, private investigator, union organizer, archivist, journalist, poet, writer, unemployed. I've also practised my favourite profession, farming, but with chemical fertilizers, the whole thing doesn't work.<sup>35</sup>

In this litany of the various jobs he held, we can glimpse the complexity of Grohovaz's life as an Italian immigrant in Canada obliged to accept all sorts of work in order to survive. This occupational precariousness is clearly one of the reasons that led him to become deeply involved in early efforts to unionize Italian workers and demand not only living wages for them and economic stability but also social and political respect.<sup>36</sup> Such trade union involvement inevitably led to tense situations and conflict not only with company owners

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<sup>35</sup> "Poi mi chiedono che mestiere faccio. Bé, modestia a parte, ho sempre dato ascolto a mio padre che continuava a ripetermi: impara l'arte e mettila da parte ... E così in Italia ho fatto: il commesso di banca, il soldato, il magazzinoiere, il dattilografo, il giornalista, l'educatore, il pescatore ed il portinaio. In Canada l'affare si complica: boscaiolo, ferroviere, contabile, interprete, cementista, carpentiere, meccanico, lava-piatti, lava automobili, aiuto-elettricista, assistente sociale, amministratore, direttore d'azienda, capo del personale, vice-direttore e direttore di redazione, guardiano notturno, direttore di club, vice-direttore di latteria, investigatore privato, organizzatore sindacale, archivist, giornalista, poeta, scrittore, disoccupato. Ho praticato anche il mio mestiere preferito, l'agricoltore, ma con i concimi chimici, la faccenda non funziona." Buranello, "Rimestando tra le acque del passato," 172–173.

<sup>36</sup> For Grohovaz's reminiscences on the union movement, see his comments in the radio talk "E io proteggo i ravanelli" in .... *e con rispetto parlando*, 178–179. Scholarly research on Grohovaz's involvement in the union movements in favour of Italian workers still needs to be carried out drawing on Grohovaz's own words, on newspaper articles,

but also with other Italians. In the preface to the novel *Strada bianca*, Grohovaz recalls that his work in support of rail workers got him fired and led to his being “betrayed” by a fellow Italian Canadian:

I remember, it happened in Gordon Bay. Highway 69 ran beside the C.N.R. rail line. I was the accountant, the “time-keeper” for a work crew; I had some time on my hands and wanted to put it to good use. A few days earlier, they had fired me because, instead of looking after the interests of the company, I was taking the side of the workers and so, as is the custom in democratic and capitalist countries, if the climb is easy, the descent is faster still. I had risen quickly from time-keeper to supervisor of the *extragangs* in Northern Ontario, and had stopped four strikes, four, by interceding on behalf of the workers, all of whom were Italian, or almost all of them; but then the General Manager, a red-headed, drunken, arrogant Irishman, cut the ground from under me because I was demanding justice and humane treatment for my people. Even a great Italian Canadian writer from Montreal betrayed me for a fistful of dollars.<sup>37</sup>

In several radio talks from the early 1980s, Grohovaz mentions his efforts to support Italian workers. In “L’assalto alle nostre poltrone” (The assault at our armchairs), delivered on CHIN Radio on 11 February 1981, for example, he

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and on archival sources, especially those in the Grohovaz fond at the National Library and Archives of Canada and on those still in private hands.

<sup>37</sup> “Ricordo, successe a Gordon Bay. Sotto la linea ferroviaria della C.N.R. passava l’autostrada 69. Io ero il contabile “marcatempo” di una squadra lavori; avevo un po’ di tempo a mia disposizione e volevo metterlo a frutto. Da pochi giorni mi avevano silurato perché invece di fare gli interessi della ditta prendevo le parti degli operai e così, secondo l’uso dei paesi democratici e capitalisti, se la salita è facile, la discesa è più veloce ancora. Da marcatempo ero salito, in fretta, fino a supervisore delle *extragangs* del Nord-Ontario, avevo fermato ben quattro scioperi intercedendo per gli operai che erano tutti italiani, o quasi tutti; ma poi il Direttore Generale, un irlandese rosso di capelli, ubriacone ed arrogante, mi tagliò le gambe perché per la mia gente chiedevo giustizia e trattamento umano. Anche un grande scrittore italo canadese di Montreal mi tradì per un pugno di dollari.” Grohovaz, *Strada bianca*, 1. Grohovaz outlines his work in favour of striking Italian workers and identifies Mario Duliani, then editor of the Montreal newspaper *La Verità*, as the one who betrayed him for a handful of dollars (\$500, to be exact); Grohovaz, “Toronto’s Italian Press,” 107.

laments the high number of Italian workers dying on the job and the fact that earlier Italian immigrants, now well established in business and the community, were taking advantage of recent Italian immigrants in the workplace and not looking after their safety. Deaths on the job were, in fact, a major problem in the Italian community.<sup>38</sup> His annoyance at the earlier generation of Italian immigrants resurfaces a couple of months later in his talk “I camaleonti della comunità: hanno cambiato più bandiere ... che mutande!” (The community chameleons: they have changed flags more often ... than underwear); in that talk, delivered on CHIN Radio on 15 April 1981, he rants against

certain anti-Italians among us who deserve all our disdain, contempt and scorn ... people who, in order to be well accepted in certain ranks, do not disdain to demean their cultural heritage: a sub-species of two-legged animals that is not worthy of the womb that gave birth to them. [...] You see them every day, these stinking countrymen of ours: anti-Italians par excellence, they destroy everything good we have to offer to this society that looks at us perplexed because it does not understand how far the split can go ... how far the thirst for power can go.<sup>39</sup>

What he sees as a betrayal of one's Italian origins leads Grohovaz to bring up, once again, the figure of the stepmother, this time, however, applied to Canada and in positive terms:

One cannot have two mothers. One can have a mother and a stepmother. Sometimes, the stepmother may even offer you a more generous breast ... more showy than your mother's meagre bosom. But don't forget that you sucked life from that gaunt, droopy bosom.

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<sup>38</sup> Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 30–32. On Italian fallen workers, see the monumental work by Toppan and Breda, *Land of Triumph and Tragedy*.

<sup>39</sup> “Ci sono certi anti-italiani tra noi che meritano tutto il nostro sdegno, spregio e disprezzo ... gente che per essere bene accetta in certi ranghi non disdegna di avvilitare il proprio retaggio culturale: una sotto-specie di animali a due zampe che non è degna del grembo che li ha messi al mondo. Questi sono peggiori dei primi. Li vedete ogni giorno questi nostri fetenti connazionali: anti-italiani per eccellenza, distruggono tutto ciò che di buono abbiamo da offrire a questa società che ci guarda perplessa perché non capisce fino a che punto può arrivare lo spacco ... fino a dove può giunger la sete del potere.” Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 59–60.

Be Canadian because you choose to be. Obey the laws ... Do more: with your wits give Canada the best of you. But, brother, never forget your mother. Never be ashamed to be Italian. Don't make excuses if things don't go as they should in your homeland ... all the world is the same. Italy has given a lot to the world.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of Italy's "meagre bosom" and her "betrayal" of Fiume and its people, Grohovaz is not prepared to forego his *italianità*; in fact, he proclaims it both verbally and linguistically, that is, in what he says and how he says it. His radio talks in Italian reveal his strong interest in the life of the Italian community in Canada and the need to protect, affirm, and advance it. His poetry in Fiuman dialect memorializes the Fiuman community of his youth, now dispersed by war and exile. Drawing on the work of Croatian anthropologist Aljoša Pužar, Gianna Mazzieri Sanković sees Grohovaz's poetry as an example of the antaenic literature that is typical of Fiume, that is, of a literary tradition in dialect that is firmly grounded in the soil that gave it birth and gives it strength.<sup>41</sup> It is also a genre that can be exported across the ocean:

The antaenic convention is able to position Fiuman literature not only across the centuries but also across continents and hemispheres. The ironic perspective from which to look at the world and the capacity for self-irony, at times even bitter – never far from Grohovaz – becomes the main thread of a literature that claims to be the custodian of the document, the witness to an era and to a lived experience.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Uno non può avere due madri. Può aver una madre ed una matrigna. A volte, la matrigna può offrirti anche un seno più generoso ... più appariscente del petto scarno di tua madre. Ma non dimenticare che da quel petto scarno e cadente hai succhiato la vita.

Sii canadese perché hai scelto così ... obbedisci alle leggi ... fai di più: con il tuo ingegno dai al Canada il meglio di te. Ma, fratello non dimenticare mai tua madre. Non vergognarti mai di essere italiano. Non cercare scuse se le cose non vanno come dovrebbero andare in Patria ... tutto il mondo è paese. Ha dato molto, al mondo, l'Italia." Grohovaz, ... e con rispetto parlando, 60.

<sup>41</sup> The term antaenic alludes to the classical myth of the Libyan giant Antaeus who drew his strength from direct contact with his mother, the Earth goddess Gaia; Hercules killed him by lifting him off the ground and crushing him to death.

<sup>42</sup> Mazzieri Sanković, "Fiume and Canada," 111.

The effort to draw strength from his roots in Fiume leads Grohovaz to try to capture and preserve his memories of the city and its dialect. In the words of his friend and fellow Fiuman, Giuliano Superina, “The Fiuman remembers and seeks himself.”<sup>43</sup> By remembering, Grohovaz is, in fact, archiving himself. In the introduction to his collection of poetry, Grohovaz points out that:

The title of this effort: “To remember the things that I remember,” also echoes my work as a statal street sweeper, all caught up as I am in gathering the documentation of Italian emigration to Canada for the Canadian National Archives. The title should really have been more Fiuman and, instead of saying “*le cose*” I should have said “*le robe*,” but the gist is the same: I must endeavour to write down something before it’s too late, before I forget my house number and start to lose my marbles ...<sup>44</sup>

He later adds:

I hope you will accept this pseudo-literary effort of mine for what it’s worth: only the wish not to let my memories and my dialect die with me.<sup>45</sup>

Grohovaz’s effort to write in dialect and, in this way, preserve the speech that identifies his *italianità fiumana*, leads him not only to sprinkle his verses

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<sup>43</sup> “Il fiumano ricorda, e cerca se stesso.” Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 7. Giuliano Superina (Fiume 1924–Toronto 2016) and his wife, Maria “Uccia” Ivis emigrated to Canada in 1952, landing at Pier 21 in Halifax; they first settled in Montreal, where they raised their three children, and then moved to Toronto where they became involved with the Club Giuliano Dalmato di Toronto. Giuliano served for a time as co-editor of the Club’s newsletter *El Boletin*; see Lini, “*El Boletin* compie vent’anni.” Maria provided the illustrations for Grohovaz’s *Per ricordar* and is thanked on p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> “El titolo de questo sforzo: ‘Per ricordar le cose che ricordo’, riflete anche la natura del mio lavor de scovazzin de Stato, intrigado come son a ingrumar la documentazion de l’emigrazion italiana in Canada per i Archivi Nazionali Canadesi. El titolo veramente doveva esser più fiuman, e al posto de dir ‘le cose’ gaverio dovuto dir ‘le robe’, el sugo però resta: bisogna darse da far a scriver xo qualcosa prima che sia troppo tardi, prima che me dimentighi el numero de casa e incominci invece a dar i numero del Lotto ...”; Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> “Spero che acetarè questo mio sforzo pseudo-letterario per quel che el val: solo un desiderio de non lassar morir con mi i mii ricordi e el mio dialeto.” Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 11.

with typical local words, idiomatic expressions, and local references but also to add, at the end of the book, a “Brief encyclopedic dictionary of Fiuman words, common places and characters, contained in the text of this volume.”<sup>46</sup> Laid out in alphabetical order, this brief dictionary constitutes a record of a time and an identity. It is also a very personal way to vent one’s anger. As Henry Veggian points out,

The poet [Grohovaz] writes in a precisely rendered Istro-Venetian dialect that fulminates against both Italy and Yugoslavia. It may have been written anywhere on earth (in Grohovaz’s case, in Canada), but it could only have been written by a person forcibly displaced from his hometown and post-World War Two Italy. Just as one cannot imagine Puzo’s fiction without New York City, one cannot imagine Grohovaz’s poetry without Fiume.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusion

Grohovaz’s *italianità* was, indeed, firmly tied to his native city. Just like Fiume, it was multiethnic, multicultural, and (for the most part) open to diversity. However, like his city, it was a threatened identity. From the safe perspective of his life in Canada, Grohovaz may have remembered his city and his youth in idyllic terms, but the reality was different. His city was ripe with tensions and its *italianità* was under siege by external forces and undermined internally by political, cultural, and nationalistic dynamics that were about to tear it apart. To retain his own *italianità*, Grohovaz was forced to abandon his hometown. Once a refugee and an exile in Italy, his *italianità* changed – no longer a natural aspect of who he was, it was now something that was badly misunderstood and needed to be defended from suspicions of fascism. With his emigration to Canada, it changed once more; this time Grohovaz came to see his *italianità*, and that of his fellow Italian immigrants, as something that needed to be affirmed and placed at the service of his new country. He praised, for example, the work that immigrants from the small Friulian town of San Quirino di Pordenone did for their community in Canada and

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<sup>46</sup> “Breve dizionario enciclopedico delle parole fiumane, luoghi comuni e personaggi, contenuti nel testo di questo volumetto.” Grohovaz, *Per ricordar*, 99–123.

<sup>47</sup> Veggian, “The Poetry of Exile,” 209.



in Italy,<sup>48</sup> or the fifty years of community created by the Famee Furlane of Toronto.<sup>49</sup> He encouraged Italian immigrants to express their *italianità* even in the little things they did because it was their trademark and because it contributed to making Canada a better place.

In our family we have adopted a new way to distinguish ourselves from others. And here, my friends, modesty has nothing to do with it because the pride of behaving well does not need useless screens. If we travel by car and give way to a pedestrian or a driver in trouble, who looks at us in disbelief for our small act of kindness, we proudly point out: “*You are most welcome ... because we are Italians ...*” Of course, if we justify ourselves in other situations, why not justify an act of courtesy to which Canadians are not accustomed? And what better justification is there than to point out the trademark? Yes, sir, I was courteous because we Italians are still old-fashioned, we are capable of being kind, helpful to our neighbours with a little gesture that surprises you, because modern society is not used to it, because it has forgotten how to be civil.

The motorist, or the passer-by, when he hears that “... *because I am Italian ...*,” knows that in addition to spaghetti, Italians also have a certain way of doing things that is superior to their own, part of an etiquette forgotten among the pages of the past.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “All’ombra del campanile di San Quirino di Pordenone,” radio talk of 31 March 1982, in Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 211–215.

<sup>49</sup> “50 anni di storia friulana a Toronto: ‘Mandi sot la nape del fogolar,’” radio talk of 6 January 1982, in Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 166–168.

<sup>50</sup> “Noi, in famiglia abbiamo adottato un nuovo sistema per distinguerci dagli altri. E qui, amici miei la modestia non c’entra perché l’orgoglio di far bene non ha bisogno di inutili paraventi. Se viaggiamo in automobile, e lasciamo il passo ad un pedone o ad un automobilista in difficoltà, che ci guarda incredulo per il nostro piccolo atto di gentilezza, con orgoglio glielo facciamo notare: “*You are most welcome ... because we are Italians ...*” Naturalmente, se si danno giustificazioni per le altre situazioni, perché non giustificare un atto di cortesia cui i canadesi non sono avvezzi? E qual migliore giustificazione se non far notare il marchio di fabbrica? Sissignore, ti ho usato una cortesia perché noi italiani siamo ancora vecchio stampo, siamo capaci di essere gentili, utili al nostro prossimo con un piccolo cenno che ti stupisce, perché la società moderna non vi è abituata, perché si è dimenticata ad essere civile.

As fate would have it, it is in Canada that Grohovaz comes to a more profound understanding of what it means to be an Italian and to understand that *italianità* is not just a characteristic one has, the product of where one was born and how one was raised, but it is a set of values and accomplishments that one can contribute for the betterment of society.

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L'automobilista, o il passante, quando sente quel "... because I am Italian ...," sa che oltre agli spaghetti, gli italiani hanno anche un certo modo di fare superiore al loro, parte di un galateo dimenticato tra le pagine del passato." Grohovaz, ... *e con rispetto parlando*, 104; italics as in the original.

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