

## Italian Canadiana

### Preface

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# Preface

## Frank Iacobucci

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Although I have always felt, over the years of my professional life, a special sense of personal joy and pride, not to mention a heightened sense of self-identity, in being involved in any cultural or literary activity listed under the rubric of “Italian Canadian,” I must say that I am particularly delighted to preface this special edition of *Italian Canadiana*, and mainly for two reasons. The first is because the topic at hand, *nostos*, this age-old tale of journeying and homecoming, and the whole idea of the Italian immigrant’s nostalgia and its many faces have always fascinated and inspired me, growing up as I did in an Italian immigrant family of the 1930s, 40s and 50s in Vancouver’s east end. The second reason is one of familial connections, as the Editor of this volume, Gabriel Niccoli, has shared with me many fond memories of our common roots, not to mention a couple of memorable returns “home” together.

Both my parents came to Canada as teenagers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, my father from the mountains of Abruzzi, my mother from a village in Calabria. The stories of their reasons for coming to Canada are remarkable in themselves. To say that life in Canada, following the end of WWI, and then through the ensuing Depression years and their aftermath, was harsh is perhaps a bit of an understatement. A life particularly unsettling, as one can imagine, for an immigrant couple with a growing family, not to mention the considerable discrimination that would befall the Italian ethnic group, particularly during the war (a member of our extended family was interned as an “enemy alien” at Petawawa during WWII). As enemy aliens, my parents, too, were required to report monthly to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I often wonder whether my parents, not unlike other immigrants, especially during the hard times just mentioned, ever felt some sort of nostalgia for the life they had left behind in their youthful days in their *paese*, notwithstanding the memories they held of the misery and desolation that afflicted that very place and time of their youth. They undoubtedly suffered the many tribulations of the immigrant journeying, the sense of displacement, the blurring of identity, the loss of loved ones, the prejudicial stereotyping, even though their initial sacrifices were somewhat modulated by their youthful desire to control the course of their destiny. As the texts in this volume I am sure will demonstrate, there are, however, various ways of managing *nostos*. And as the title indicates, “patterns” also suggest conscious modes of engaging in an appropriate manner this life-altering course.

Growing up in a strongly “ethnic” and working-class part of Vancouver, well populated by Italian immigrants, I do not recall my parents nurturing any type of what we might call today deviant or inju-

icious nostalgia, the type of plaintive longing that consumed, as I remember, a few of the Italian immigrants in those neighbourhoods, mostly single males whose families had been left behind, *nel paese*. The absence of a conflicting and unproductive pattern of *nostos* in my parents perhaps was due in part to the fact that, having both emigrated in their youth, they still possessed a sense for discovering and constructing new venues of existence, for fashioning renewed horizons and objectives. This pioneering spirit was likely lacking in others unable to engage properly the vitality that a new, albeit challenging, life often proposes. A dynamic sense of an *altrove*, an elsewhere which, while disorienting and nebulous for some immigrants unwilling to let go of the past, was for my parents the regenerating *locus* where their past seems to have served as a solid foundation for their family's future. In other words, I think their *nostos*, their sense of origins, fuelled rationally their imagination, propelling it toward a working model of proper identity construct.

A few years ago, on the occasion of my receiving an honorary degree from the University of Calabria, just a few kilometres from my mother's birthplace, I could not help reminiscing about my parents' sacrifices as immigrants, their work ethic, their old-country resourcefulness, their unqualified love for their children, and their supreme ability to turn the concept of *nostos*, this yearning for some sort of homecoming, into an enduring quest for an evolving sense of home here in Canada. A new sense of home that became also a source and transmission of human values that nurtured and guided the lives of my siblings as well as mine. A legacy that, in my modest view, may well derive from an exemplum of a *nostos* well managed, on the part of my parents, the notion of a *nostos* lived with a cogent sense of purpose, constructively and conscientiously.

I commend the Editor of this special issue of *Italian Canadiana* and all who have contributed their talents and perspectives in order to create a most impressive volume.