

*There is No Home to
Go Back to.
Life Across
Boundaries:
An Italian-Canadian
Literary Perspective*

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Abstract | Migrant literature is the artistic exemplification of border-crossing: from the linguistic hybridity that brings the author into breaking the boundaries between native and acquired languages, to the concoction of genres and styles which make migrant works eclectic and unique, migrant words become reminders of the struggle between home and away, a conflict that the itinerant being tries to resolve within literature.

The case proposed here is that of Italian-Canadian literature, a sub-system within the multicultural mosaic of Canadian literature: the pluralization of selves, languages, and places enacted in the works by Italian migrant writers becomes symbolic of the border breaking and bridging between genres, languages and cultural experiences.

In the process of writing, in their search for identity and roots, the three migrant authors analyzed occupy the space in-between home and away to finally realize that there is no home to go back to, because 'this' is now Home.

Key-words | *Migrant Literature, Italian-Canadians, Boundaries, Identity, Home, Heterolingualism, Translation.*

The world has traditionally been conceived in separate blocks: the North and the South, the East and the West, etc.; for this reason, we have learnt to construct

cultural and artistic debates around similar types of twofold oppositions: the known/unknown, the I/Other, the center/periphery, stability/mobility, and home/away, among others. This conceptual partition has reinforced borders and differentiation, even when not physically existent. Nevertheless, the realization of the ambiguity of these intangible boundaries and the manifestation of new spaces of transience engendered by border-crossing beings and their itinerant narratives have started to undermine these long-established binary conceptions.

Civilization is movement and evolution and needs not be territorialized or enclosed within defined margins. In the current transnational postmodern world we live in, culture is to be regarded as a body that lives, transforms and displaces, and the traditional constructed dualities give way to ever-changing sites of interference and interaction in which original tales of manifold perspectives and juxtaposition lead to the abolition of borders, of definable spaces, of identifiable oppositions between here and there.

The diasporic nature of our globalized world is transforming subjectivities, perceptions, and cultural dynamics, and a study on the artistic productions of multicultural societies such as Canada¹ or the United States² may shed light on the way identities are formed and imagined across physical and cultural borders and boundaries: “[w]ith the immigration and importation of multiple groups speaking different languages from a range of social and economic backgrounds, the Americas have proven a fruitful terrain for studying such polylingual voices and transnational discourses” (Gentzler, 2012: 2).

More specifically, the Canadian ethnic landscape offers us the exemplification of a complex mosaic of *hyphenated identities* (Caglar, 1997): individuals born out of migrant contexts, who undermine the traditional view that identifies a person with one specific home territory. Implying the idea of cultural fragmentation, these hyphenated identities are, in fact, characterized by a *deterritorialized* sense of Self: beyond and across territorial boundaries the ‘I’ does no longer recognize itself with a single mother/fatherland.

The pluralism perceived at the level of *identity making* by migrants in Canada is reinforced by the existing bipolar/bicultural environment represented in the

¹ For a sampling of the literature written about ethnic writing in Canada, see also the collection of essays *Identifications* edited by Jars Balan (1982), *Tricks With a Glass Writing Ethnicity in Canada* edited by Rocio G. Davis and Rosalia Baena (2000), and the work of Enoch Padolsky, among which his essay *Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English* (1994).

² For the United States see also Franco (2006), Skerrett (2002), among others.

English/French mainstream Canadian cultural productions (Padolsky, 1996). On the matter, Barbara Godard (1990) highlighted how the dominant definitions of Canadian national literature have regularly developed around the English Canadian/Quebec dichotomy and its official bilingual policy, marginalizing all the realities that do not adhere to this binary model.

When discussing migrant literature in the Canadian context, the issue has been associated with minority and ethnic writing, underlining the peripheral nature of works that distance from said English/French dualism. In fact, as stated by Pivato, “ethnic literature has traditionally been defined as writing in the unofficial languages of Canada” (1985: 27), entailing that when the ethnic writer chooses to write in a foreign language, he/she is consciously opting to remain obscure, out of sight, outside the boundaries of major literature, such as in the cases of Italian-Canadian writing presented here: works that challenge the notion of the country’s duality in order to offer a new ‘quadrangular’ framework.

Demographic studies show the importance of the Italian-Canadian ethnic group, now considered as the sixth largest in Canada.³ Italian immigration to Canada is, nevertheless, a relatively recent phenomenon: the main migratory influx came from the late 1940s to the 1970s (Ramirez, 1989; Iacovetta, 1993) as a post World War II phenomenon, what the sociologist Clifford J. Jansen has defined as the “postwar boom” (Jansen, 1988: 15). In 1940, when Italy joined the conflict on the side of Germany declaring war on France and Great Britain, people of Italian heritage residing in Canada were designated *enemy aliens*⁴ and interned for their actual or alleged involvement with Fascism, and immigration from Italy was halted.

In 1947, when the ban was finally lifted, hundreds of thousands of Italians arrived in Canada as a result of the disastrous political and economic situation in Italy and Canada’s relatively open immigration policy. This wave, according to the

³ Ethnocultural Portrait of Canada Highlight Tables, 2006 Census: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97-562/pages/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&Code=01&Data=Count&Table=2&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All&CSDFilter=5000>

⁴ On the subject see *Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of World War II*: <http://www.italiancanadianww2.ca>, a project of the Columbus Centre, the largest Italian-Canadian cultural centre in Canada, which commemorates the experience of Italian Canadians during World War II through a permanent exhibit at the Columbus Centre in Toronto, said website, and two recent anthologies – *Behind Barbed Wire: Creative Works of the Internment of Italian-Canadians* and *Beyond Barbed Wire: Essays on the Internment of Italian-Canadians* – published by Guernica Editions in 2012.

historian Bruno Ramirez, made Italy “the second only to Great Britain as the source of Canadian immigration” (Ramirez, 1989: 7).

The many titles dedicated to the subject agree in reflecting the difficulties encountered by the community in establishing its presence on the multicultural Canadian territory following the mass migratory movements of the 20th century: in his compendium on Canadian ethnicity, Magocsi (1999) lists Italians as one of many “Canada’s peoples” that make up the country’s diverse population; Kenneth Bagnell, in his *Canadese: A Portrait of the Italian Canadians* (1989), adopts a historical perspective to recount the Italian presence on Canadian soil and its first difficult years, which are also described in Perin and Sturino’s *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada* (1989), Bruno Ramirez’s *The Italians in Canada* (1989), and in *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (1993).

Many of the publications on the subject of Italian-Canadians tend to be a social portrait of the local realities of the areas with the highest concentration of Italian immigration like Montreal and Toronto, and the efforts of the Italian communities in building a piece of ‘home away from home’: Ramirez’s *Les premiers italiens de Montréal: l’origine de la Petite Italie du Québec* (1984) describing the birth of the Italian community in Quebec, the *Italo-Québécois*, and Nicholas DeMaria Harney’s *Eh, Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto* (1998), which questions the issue of Italian ethnic identity – the *Italianità* – within the specific multicultural context of Toronto.

In order to gain an insight on what it means to be Italian in Canada, without resorting to sociological/anthropological investigations, it is possible to approach the subject from a literary perspective: artistic practices born out of contexts of mobility help us reassess migration beyond statistical figures and portray the way identities are formed and imagined across geographical borders and cultural boundaries.

The ‘borders’ that define Italian-Canadian literature are fuzzy and, because of the novelty of the matter, are constantly being redefined. Halfway between *Italianistica* and Canadian Studies, Italian-Canadian works are marked thematically by a focus on journeys and separations, the nostalgia for an idealized country and the past, the re-construction of identity, and the mythical search for roots; linguistically, these narratives are characterized by heterolingualism and translation practices. What emerges from these works is a picture of post-modern identities: displaced, itinerant, ethnic, hybrid, fragmented, and belonging to a minority.

What it is common among those that share the label of Italian-Canadian writers is that “[d]ifference, or the awareness of being or contributing something different”, a

consciousness of being part of (at least) two originally distinct communities that converge into a new *hyphenated identity* and the willingness of writing about the experience of being in-between two cultures (D'Alfonso, 1996: 31).

Works by Italian-Canadian writers have recently been acknowledged as a literary (sub-)system gathered under the comprehensive label of *ethnic writing*⁵ within the bigger family of Canadian literature: “Italian-Canadian literature, as a body of writing, illustrates many of the qualities of a varied ethnic literature in Canada” (Pivato, 1985: 31).

The heterogeneity of the group is evident in the (hi)stories presented and the choices made at the level of enunciation: some of these writers prefer English, some choose French, some Italian, and others recur to their parents’ dialects. In the works of many of these writers – as in the three authors presented here – the tetraglossic model proposed by Henni Gobard (1976) based on four different codes (vernacular, vehicular, referential and mythic⁶) used by the ethnic writer engaged in constructing the ethnic identity become apparent.

What really distinguishes Italian-Canadian writers, however, is their being “a form of Canadian ethnic minority writing in binary contrast to Canadian ethnic majority writing, that is, British-Canadian writing in English Canada (or Quebec) and French-Canadian (Quebécois) writing in Quebec (and Canada)” (Padolsky in Loriggio, 1996: 253) while also representing “the link between the ‘two solitudes’” (Salvatore, 1999: 99). Hence, the in-between position of these works belonging to neither majority Canadian literature (Anglophone and/or Francophone), nor to canonical Italian literature, resulting in the call for recognition of their distinctiveness – both in their themes and style, and in their history.

The history of Italian-Canadian literature begins with the first letters and travel reports of the Italian explorers on North American lands in the 15th century: the

⁵ In North America, migrant writing has often been associated with the concept of ethnicity and minority; migration is, in fact, seen as one of the causes to the subsistence of social/cultural minorities in their literary form: “[e]thnic literature refers to works by minority writers, particularly those novels and short stories that deal specifically with the experience of being a minority” (Rangno and Meyers, 2010: 58). From this perspective, labeling a work or an artist as *ethnic* means to classify and relegate a priori those who do not belong to the cultural norm to a position of marginality.

⁶ In *L'Alienation Linguistique* (1976), Henri Gobard claims that any linguistic community has at its disposal four types of language: a vernacular, which is the only mother tongue and is local and spontaneous, the vehicular, which is national and learnt in order to communicate outside of the local community, the referential, which is tied to the cultural and written tradition, and the mythical language, the verbal and sacred lingo, which is incomprehensible to most.

Jesuit missionary Francesco Giuseppe Bressani, with his *Breve Relatione* (1653), is considered the progenitor of the group. However important, in fact, these first steps into building a genre are not as critical as the moment in which the consciousness of the belonging to – and the existence of – a specific body of literature emerged. And that happened a few centuries later.

The decade from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties saw the birth of Italian-Canadian literature as we know it today, with Pier Giorgio di Cicco as its ‘founding father’: he collected and edited *Roman Candles* (1978), the very first anthology of Italian-Canadian authors, in this specific instance poets, an effort that showed the formation of a common endeavor and the emergence of a similar awareness.

From this moment on, the first voices to reflect the Italian identity in Canada start to appear, voices that speak different languages and take different forms, because “[t]he Italic voices do not follow an identical melody; yet the harmonies do not antagonize each other” (D’Alfonso, 1996: 31): from Frank Paci and his novel *The Italians* (1978) – the very first English language novel to deal with the experience of Italian immigrants in Canada – to Marco Micone and his play *Gens du Silence* (1982), which depicted the Italian immigrant condition in Quebec, soon followed by the first poems by Mary di Michele and Antonio D’Alfonso.

The same D’Alfonso, one of the most influential figures in the group, founded Guernica Editions in 1978: the publishing house that would come to have the key role in promoting these authors, and whose mandate was to give voice to ‘marginal’ cultural products that were not largely recognized by the dominant Canadian culture of the time and tearing down borders between ethnic and linguistic groups (Salvatore, 1999).

In 1984, the first edition of *Italian Canadian Voices* came into existence: a collection of prose and poetry supported by a federal government grant within its multicultural agenda. “It was a voyage of discovery, finding the ‘voices’ that described for others the experience of immigration, up-rootedness, and settlement in a new environment very different from their familiar past” (DiGiovanni, 2006: i). This anthology, a pioneer in its representation of these artists as a consistent body, is proof of the appearance of a consciousness of a specific ethnic identity.

However, when these writers first came together into a group, the experimental nature of the venture was clear: “In 1986 there were about 30 active writers of Italian-Canadian background (...) I knew this because I had their names, addresses, and book titles (...) This was, and still is, a disparate group of writers, scattered across the country. It was hard to imagine that they would produce a significant body of

writing”, admitted Pivato, who despite being one of the initiators could see the limitations of the initial attempt (Pivato, 2007:16).

Twenty years from then, their number has quadrupled and the proliferation of Italian-Canadian literature seems to have paralleled Canada’s adoption of an official policy of multiculturalism (1971⁷) as part of its national identity. The value of these narratives is evident in their maturity to address specific questions: the excursions into gender writing as in Marisa Franceschi’s *Pillars of Lace* (1998), the first anthology dedicated to women’s voices of the Italian-Canadian, and *Looking through my mother’s eyes* (2004) edited by Giovanna del Negro, giving visibility to folk genres by immigrant women – the ‘margin of the margin’ of migrant experience; the attention given to Canada’s multilingualism in the collections *La poesia italiana nel Quebec* (1983) edited by Tonino Caticchio and *Quêtes: Textes d’auteurs italo-quebécois* (1983) edited by Caccia and D’Alfonso, registering the presence of an active francophone Italian-Canadian artistic community.

The ensemble of the works produced by the group in the last century allows for an observation of the evolution of the field, as well as an outline of the development of the migrant writer’s identity: from the first emigrant workers – outsiders in the new continent – who wrote home as a way of relating their experience overseas with little or no formal literary skills, to the most recent cases of intellectual/academic (migrant) figures, for whom writing is (often) a profession and have established a new home in the acquired society.

The group thus represents a wealth of different perspectives on the migrant experience, while being bonded by the idea of the conflicting transition between home and away, metaphorized into a search for roots and identity: “the migrant’s sense of disorientation about their home and their sense of belonging – which can be a consequence of the pluralization of self-identities, languages, biographical plans and places that inevitably occurs in a migratory experience – turns out to be a more or less active search for a new home and a new sense of belonging” (Glenn et al., 2011: 1).

Often, as in the works of the three authors presented here, (the pluralization of) language is used to depict the juxtaposition of past and the present, home and away, and compare the reality they live in to the family heritage and lost motherland.

⁷ “In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation.” See: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp>

Pavlenko and Lantolf argue that “the narratives of the bilingual writers in themselves represent a space where identities are reconstructed and life stories retold in the security of the double displacement granted by writing in a second language” (2000: 162).

Nowhere more than in the poem *Babel* by Antonio D’Alfonso is the *double displacement*, the negotiation between selves, languages, and places becomes evident, resulting in a journey through the linguistic schizophrenia of the migrant writer that epitomizes the search for a sense of home and belonging:

Nativo di Montréal
élevé comme Québécois
forced to learn the tongue of power
vivi en México como alternativa
figlio del sole e della campagna
par les franc parleurs aimé
finding thousands like me suffering
me casé y divorcié en tierra fria
nipote di Guglionesi
parlant politique malgré moi
steeled in the school of Old Aquinas
queriendo luchar con mis amigos latinos
Dio where shall I be demain
(trop vif) qué puedo saber yo
spero che la terra be mine.⁸

(D’Alfonso, 1988: 57)

One of the most prominent figures in the Italian-Canadian panorama, Antonio D’Alfonso was born in 1953 by Italian parents who had migrated to Montreal. D’Alfonso is exemplary of a tormented life in-between the *two Canadian solitudes*, having lived in a predominantly Anglophone environment within a predominantly Francophone city. His multi-faceted work is a mosaic of languages that exemplifies the above-mentioned tetraglossic model proposed by Gobard: his multilingual past is

⁸ Native of Montreal/Raised like a Quebecois/Forced to learn the tongue of power/I lived in Mexico as an alternative/Son of the sun and the countryside/Loved by the French speakers/Finding thousands like me suffering/I married and divorced in the cold land/Grandson of Guglionesi/Talking politics in spite of myself/Steeled in the school of Old Aquinas/Wanting to fight with my Latin friends/God where shall I be tomorrow/ (I’m too alive) what do I know/Hoping the land to be mine. (My translation)

here retraced in English, French, Italian and Spanish (married to a Mexican woman, the author lived for a time in Mexico⁹).

The page becomes the place to tear down barriers, and connect past and present identities, languages and cultures; his search for self and home becomes the necessity to bridge the different cultural heritages and realities embracing them all, like in his book of prose-pomes *The Other Shore* and its French counterpart *L'Autre Rivage*.

Even Italian is a learned language for me. Language of the North, it is not the language my thoughts were formed in, nor the music I hear in my head at night when I cannot get to sleep. Already a transformation occurs: from Guglionese, I must translate into Italian. When I write I translate. Sometimes no translation occurs. The words or phrases come directly into English or French. A linkage of differences (D'Alfonso, 1988: 109).

Which in its French translation reads:

Même l'italien est une langue apprise. Langue du nord, ce n'est pas la langue dans laquelle mes idées émergent, ni la musique qui naît en moi la nuit lorsque je n'arrive pas à dormir. Déjà là une transformation s'opère : du guglionese à l'italien. Quand j'écris, je traduis. Parfois, aucune traduction n'est nécessaire ; mots et phrases surgissent, toutes faites, en anglais ou en français. Un lien de différence (D'Alfonso, 1987: 127).

Here, the binary framework upon which the discourse on migration writing and translation has been traditionally built, with the opposition between I/Other, original/copy, source/target, etc., is challenged by D'Alfonso and other itinerant writers who opt for “translating one’s own writings into another language” (Grutman, 2009: 257): migrant authors become self-translators, both I and Other.

The borders between original/translation are blurred, and so is any standard of reference to gauge the correspondence between the two texts in the two different languages: “in the case of an author translating his or her own works, the standard – although by no means unproblematic – measure of the faithfulness of a translation is no longer operative: the conformity, or lack thereof, of the translation to the form or to the sense of the original text is no longer pertinent, replaced by the author's mere presence, which becomes, for such readers and critics, the guarantee that what is

⁹ “I married a Mexican woman, the daughter of a diplomat. We decided to live in Mexico City. The idea was for me to become a Mexican citizen in order to follow her when she would go to work for the Mexican Embassy in Rome. This was a dream. I wanted our future child to grow up as an Italian” (D'Alfonso, 1996: 51).

essential in the work has not been lost in the passage from one language to another” (St-Pierre, 1996: 235).

Writing becomes a rite of passage into the rediscovery of the mother tongue, because “[y]our mother-tongue sounds as foreign to you as any language you do not understand. Forgotten as the life-style you once had” (D’Alfonso, 1986: 60); the reduplication of the text in the two languages amplifies the discourse of writing as a journey of discovery and search for home and identity, and the seeming impossibility of finding one. Always displaced, regardless of the language, D’Alfonso is never at home anywhere.

The myth of Babel and the barrier represented by languages is exploited by another Italian-Canadian authors, Marco Micone, in the homonymous one-act play published in the magazine *Vice Versa* that explores the communication problems within a multilingual migrant family. The dialogues of the play move among four linguistic codes: the *mythical*, standard Italian, the *vernacular*, Molisan (a dialect of central Italy), the *vehicular*, French, and the *referential*, English. This Babelian chaos is the reason for the silence that hinders the communication within (and outside of) a family whose members adopt different tongues. Languages create boundaries and, conversely (and ironically), allow the writer to break the boundaries of the traditional work.

Silence is the topic of another work for theater by Micone, who in 1982 writes and performs on stage the heterolingual *Gens du Silence* (The Voiceless People): a polyphonic portrait of first-generation Italian immigrant families in Montreal, a play that portrays the difficulties Micone and his own family may have encountered when moving to Canada in 1958. The similarities are evident: the play starts in 1959 and follows the Rossi family from a “sunbleached stonehouse (...) on a hill in Southern Italy” (Micone, 1988: 11) to a working-class area of Montreal in “between three cement quarries and the Metropolitan Boulevard” (35), staging what appears to be Micone’s own memory of his migratory experience.

Juxtaposing Montreal English, Joual (a variety of Quebec French), and Italian, Micone aims at giving voice to the voiceless people, the ethnic minorities alienated from the larger society and neglected by mainstream literature.

We must replace the culture of silence by immigrant culture, so that the peasant in us stands up, so that the immigrant in us remembers, and so that the Québécois in us can start to live. Write; fine but in a way that everyone can understand you. Young people must find themselves in texts written by someone who lived like them, who understands and wants to help them. Their being

different has to become a reason for them to struggle, and not cause of complexes and passivity. (Micone, 1997: 65)

Torn between the need to be accepted and the desire to maintain their home culture, each member of the family comes to represent one side of the migrant identity: the mother's rejection and denial, the father's submissiveness and assimilation, and the son and daughter's rebelliousness against the mainstream cultural ideology.

In order to complete their rite of passage, their journey into their new home, and overcome the invisible borders between them (the immigrants) and the others (the Quebecois) that restrict them to a *liminal* position in society, the family has to break the silence and translate their otherness in a way they can be understood.

Micone's writing, like many of other migrant authors' works, is imbued with the experience of languages and the process of translation because "[n]owhere is the ontology of otherness more apparent than in the process of translation" (Pivato, 2003: 104). It is especially in the practice of remembering the Self through/as the Other that the migrant narratives offered here provide a redefinition of the relationship between writing and translation and the concept of originality/creativity.

Such is the case offered by the same Micone, who first wrote many of his plays in French (*Gens du silence, Addolorata, Déjà l'agonie*) between 1982 and 1996, and in 2005 he self-translated them into Italian (*Non era per noi, Una Donna, Il ritorno*) and, again, translated them back into French (*Silences, Una Donna, Migrances*). Language becomes a tool of manipulation, and translation a subversive activity to give voice to these silent, marginalized migrant people, and a marker of his search for truth about his own ethnic identity.

The linguistic experimentation carried out by Micone and other migrant writers undermines the traditional boundaries between 'creative' writing and translation, creating a space of *alterity* in which the concept of originality and uniformity are challenged.

Among the most linguistically creative and eclectic writers is Dorina Michelutti. Using different linguistic devices than Micone's, her heterolingual work exposes the internal conflict between the acquired languages and the mother tongues, such as in her 1989 essay *Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue*, in which she recounts her experience as a writer.

Between the acquired language and the mother tongue, how can there be common ground? The two languages have long since staked out their territory within the psyche and the balance that has been achieved is seamless and invisible. For writers who would explore that boundary, there is no recourse but to approach both languages in their oral states as reservoirs.

(Michelut, 1989: 64)

Born in Friuli, an autonomous region of Italy with a strong historical and linguistic identity, Dorina Michelutti – also known as Dôre Michelut, the Friulian form of her Italian name – spent her first years in a Friulian environment, a language that, until then, she considered her mother tongue. In 1958, her family migrated to Canada, where she grew up and conducted a partly Anglophone life. After returning to Italy to attend university in a desire to reconcile with the other mother tongue, Italian, and subsequently to Canada in order to reconnect to what she had once called home, she realizes that these different parts of her life – her different selves – cannot reconcile, ever.

In her search for roots, and in an attempt to resolve her inner contrasts, Michelut recurs to writing. The writer is forced to ‘come to terms’ with her languages: her mother tongue (Friulian, a minority language spoken in a small province of northern Italy) and the acquired languages (English first, and Italian then), languages that “had been amazingly attracted and yet unable to touch and penetrate” (Michelut, 1989: 66). Thus, writing becomes for her the rediscovery not only of her Self, but also of a new literary territory born out of the boundaries these newly acquired languages: a *contact zone*¹⁰ (Pratt, 1991).

Michelut does not subjugate to the need of translating her past experiences in the acquired language for the readers’ need: “[t]ranslation seemed a puny effort in such a struggle; something always seemed betrayed, and I avoided it” (Michelut, 1989: 66). What had been lived in Italian or Friulian, or English stayed in that language, on the page. Languages acquire a life of their own and translate the different states of reality and selves of the migrant life; languages are not objects, but rather subjects. Committing to let languages live within her, she engages in letting them speak on the page.

¹⁰ Contemporary scholarship on the subject has suggested the existence of a spatial dimension – outside of the binary representation mentioned above – within which the cultural products of the migrant encounter occur, the contact zones: the “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, 1991: 1).

In two of her collections of poems *Loyalty to the Hunt* (1986) and *Ouroboros: The Book that Ate Me* (1990) Michelut breaks the linguistic boundaries, creating a dialogue among her three mother tongues in order to reconnect her different linguistic and cultural identities. In order to resolve the clashes between her multilingual and multicultural selves, Michelut needs to reconstruct her experiences on the page mediating among them.

The more I wrote, the more I found myself grammatically separating the languages. One poem would become two: one in either language. I would work on them until they seemed to snap apart and become independent entities; each becoming progressively more untranslatable as it progressed in its own direction (Michelut, 1989: 67).

An example of Michelut's double voicing is provided by her Italian poem *Altro Che* and its English version 1977, which the author presented on the same page, as in an imaginary discussion:

Le righe chiare,
disegnate, la politica
fatta credendo. Chi ero?
Nessuno direi ora.
Eppure, il rischio
della pelle c'era. Ma come
subito dopo Moro
tutti in analisi?
Siete arrivati
alla mia partenza.
Ed io, dove andavo
con tutte le porte
spalancate e i venti
della rabbia in corpo?

Lines clearly drawn.
Revolution through sheer
belief. Who was I?
No one, I'd say now.
Yet the risk was real
for it burst all doors
and set the winds of anger
loose in my body.
To abandon history for
psychoanalysis, so easily?
How could you arrive
on the shores
of what I left behind?
Impossible to bear.

(Michelut, 1990: 19)

In Michelut's work languages are not bounded; letting her multiple selves recount the experiences lived in those idioms, she creates a dialogue among the different versions: "I was generating a dialectical experience that was relative to both languages, and yet, at the same time, I was beyond them both" (1989: 67).

In these multilingual dialogues it is not languages that are being translated, but rather her Selves, because “[t]he condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being,” as argued by Michael Cronin, describing how “[h]e or she moves from a source language and culture to a target language and culture so that *translation* takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another” (2006: 45, original italics).

Migration and translation, from this perspective, become similar practices: two “forms of mobility” (Polezzi, 2012: 102) involving an agent traversing the boundaries between familiar/home and Other. The presence of an itinerant agent (the migrant writer) is not the only parallel between the two activities of border-crossing: “the connection between migration and translation (...) highlights the fact that cultures, languages, texts and people often move together and that the permeability (or otherwise) of any borders to one type of movement also carries implications for the others” (idem).

The permeability of borders is probably the most evident characteristic of the migrant narratives examined here. In their search for Self and Home in the new lands, migrant writers appropriate cultures and languages becoming themselves and their texts vehicles to translate a *deterritorialized* reality.

To sum up, Italian-Canadian migrant works are produced within a context of itinerancy that pervades these narratives at both the linguistic and thematic level, playing a fundamental role in the perception of the migrant’s identity.

The word on the page is an act of border-crossing: to write becomes to travel, “to enter a space, a zone, a territory (...) characterized by movement” (Chambers, 1994: 10). This journey, metaphorically depicted through an excursion into the migrant’s languages, assumes the value of a search for home: “amongst all the literatures of migration the highest proportion deals in some way with ideas of return, whether actualized or remaining imaginary. To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their ‘own’ past and place it is rarely fully satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too” (King, et al., 1995: 14).

The unfeasibility of a return is to be found not in the impossibility of crossing physical boundaries, but rather in the realization that the fictional space that the migrant has come to occupy inside and outside its narratives has bridged the two realities, the Here and There, the Now and Then. In other words, there is no home to go back to, because this is now Home.

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