

## Italian Canadiana

### Introduction

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# Introduction

This volume brings together many of the contributions presented at the sixteenth biennial conference of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers (AICW), “Italian-Canadian Literature: Departures, Journeys, Destinations,” which was held August 11-14, 2016, in Padula, in the Southern Italian region of Campania. This conference was made possible thanks to a fruitful collaboration with, and the generous hospitality of, the local members of the non-profit organization Nova Civitas (with gratitude for the work of then-President Gianfranco Cataldo) which promotes local tourism, and the Department of Humanities of the University of Salerno. The gathering in Padula was the initiative of Enrico Padula (former Consul General of Italy in Montreal), and the result of his many conversations with AICW Past-president Licia Canton. Padula, which was the point of departure of migrant flows directed to Southern America in the early twentieth century, was the ideal location for the AICW conference centred around the main theme of mobility. Moreover, as the venue of significant battles which led to the Unification of Italy in the nineteenth century, Val del Diano (the area where Padula is located) was a source of inspiration for reflections on the construction of the Italian national identity; on what it means to be Italian beyond national borders; and on the processes of transformation that the Italian identity undergoes in a Canadian multicultural context. Finally, as a little town in a marginal geographical position and yet with great cultural potential, Padula was the ideal venue for a conference where reflections on the position of Italian-Canadian literature within the Canadian literary system were widely shared.

This is testified in particular by Jim Zuccherò's and Eva Pelayo Sanudo's articles included in the first section of this volume. While Aldo Colangelo shares some reflections on migration from a sociological perspective, the other articles are representative of emerging research interests in Italian-Canadian literary criticism, like the fictional representation of Italy and motherhood in Italian-Canadian women's writing as discussed by Giusy Cesari and Laura Rorato respectively; and the challenges posed by the translation of Italian-Canadian literature as illustrated in the article by Luisa Marino whose Italian translation of Licia Canton's short story 'The Motorcycle' is included in the second section 'Creative Writing.' Meanwhile, Domenico Beneventi's analysis of Monica Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants* makes links

between physical/emotional nourishment, sexuality, and memory, arguing that Meneghetti struggles through familial and cultural loss through the reification of food as the locus of memory, desire, and sexual identity. The creative works collected in this volume (including short stories, poems and novel excerpts) testify how the construction and transformation of the authors' Italian cultural identity within a Canadian multicultural context has involved a fluid adaptation of literary forms, which cross genre and thematic borders to create new spaces for self-expression. This stands out clearly from the short stories by Nic Battigelli, Licia Canton, Domenic Cusmano, Delia De Santis, Cristina Pepe, Rosetta Rosati and Pietro Vitelli; from the poems by Carmela Circelli, Silvia Falsaperla and Venera Fazio; and from the novel excerpts by Theresa Carilli, Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli and Emilio Sarlo. These creative works, in fact, narrate stories of family, love and cultural identity negotiation under different literary forms and from different perspectives. Moreover, the three personal essays giving voice to the authors' reflections add other crucial themes to this volume: racial identity, in the case of Gil Fagiani and Maria Lisella, and mental health in the case of Eufemia Fantetti. Finally, Anna Foschi's interview with documentary filmmaker Adriana Monti, together with Liana Cusmano's interviews with poet George Amabile and author Michelle Alfano offer reflections on intergenerational memory, trauma and gender identity.

Overall, this volume shows how the authors of these contributions travel across Italian and Canadian cultures and across different genres, thus creating fluid forms of art which allow them to move beyond their in-betweenness and to inhabit multiple shifting spaces. With their ongoing transformations, they shed new light on the cultural and thematic variety of Italian-Canadian literature and open up the discussion on new perspectives and possibilities of change and re-invention. From this viewpoint, looking at Italian-Canadian contemporary authors and scholars' interests presented in this volume helps us to see how migration, as the first main theme in Italian-Canadian literature and criticism, has been a crucial point of departure for new directions and destinations.

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