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An Interview with Fulvio Caccia

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Résumé de l'article

In this interview, Fulvio Caccia, an Italian-Canadian Governor General's Award–winning francophone poet, novelist, and essayist, reflects on his literary career spanning over four decades. A prolific writer who has published over two dozen books, Caccia discusses the underlying themes in his works and the unique challenges posed by different literary forms. Caccia acknowledges that he often explores themes of identity and belonging in his creative endeavours, readily unravelling the layers of the immigrant experience. In his search for self-discovery, he challenges conventional notions of nationality and cultural belonging. A Montrealer at heart, but now living in the Paris region, Caccia delves into the genesis of his novel, La coïncidence (Triptyque, 2005), which focuses in part on the École Polytechnique massacre, a mass shooting that occurred on the grounds of the University of Montreal on 6 December 1989, killing fourteen female engineering students and injuring many others. In the narrative, the author looks into the enduring impact of past traumas on present lives, the complexities of human relationships, and the interplay of fate, love, and tragedy. Beyond a mere discussion of this novel, which was translated from French into English by Robert Richard and published by Guernica Editions in 2015, Caccia offers in this interview profound insights into his poetry, which draws extensively from his experiences as the son of Italian immigrants.

An Interview with Fulvio Caccia

Mary Melfi
Montreal, Quebec

Summary: In this interview, Fulvio Caccia, an Italian-Canadian Governor General's Award–winning francophone poet, novelist, and essayist, reflects on his literary career spanning over four decades. A prolific writer who has published over two dozen books, Caccia discusses the underlying themes in his works and the unique challenges posed by different literary forms. Caccia acknowledges that he often explores themes of identity and belonging in his creative endeavours, readily unravelling the layers of the immigrant experience. In his search for self-discovery, he challenges conventional notions of nationality and cultural belonging. A Montrealer at heart, but now living in the Paris region, Caccia delves into the genesis of his novel, *La coïncidence* (Triptyque, 2005), which focuses in part on the École Polytechnique massacre, a mass shooting that occurred on the grounds of the University of Montreal on 6 December 1989, killing fourteen female engineering students and injuring many others. In the narrative, the author looks into the enduring impact of past traumas on present lives, the complexities of human relationships, and the interplay of fate, love, and tragedy. Beyond a mere discussion of this novel, which was translated from French into English by Robert Richard and published by Guernica Editions in 2015, Caccia offers in this interview profound insights into his poetry, which draws extensively from his experiences as the son of Italian immigrants.

Keywords: Italian-Quebecois literature, transcultural literature, tricultural identities, expat writers, fate and destiny

Introduction

Fulvio Caccia, an Italian-Canadian francophone writer, has published over two dozen books of critically acclaimed poetry, novels, and essays; despite this prolific output, he is still little known to the general reading public. A key player and observer of the italophone literary scene, since the early 1980s he has produced many works that focus on the Italian-Canadian immigrant experience. Co-founder of the trilingual, transcultural magazine *Vice Versa*, he served as editor-in-chief for twelve years. In this position, he led the debate

on the Italian immigrant experience as a means of uniting and overcoming Canada's two solitudes.

In 1988, he participated in the founding of the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers. In 1994, his book *Aknos,* published by Guernica Editions, received the Governor General's Award for French-language poetry. In 1995, *Ellipse*, the magazine for writers in translation, devoted a special issue to both his work and Mary Melfi's. In 2002, he was awarded the first prize for poetry by the F.G. Bressani Foundation.

Caccia's early novels, such as *La ligne gothique* (Triptyque, 2004), *La coïncidence* (Triptyque, 2005), and *Le secret* (Triptyque, 2006), as well as his more recent ones, *La frontière tatouée* (Triptyque, 2010) and *L'été catalan* (Balzac, 2017), investigate the migrant's ambiguous identity with all its complications. In the novel *La coïncidence*, which was translated into English and published by Guernica Editions in 2015, the tragic nature of not fitting in is explored at length. This book focuses, in part, on the École Polytechnique massacre, a mass shooting that occurred on the grounds of the University of Montreal on 6 December 1989, killing fourteen female engineering students and injuring countless others. In the novel, Caccia looks into the enduring impact of past traumas on present lives, the complexities of human relationships, and the interplay of fate, love, and tragedy. These themes are re-examined in some of the essays he has written for a number of newspapers and magazines, including *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*.

A Montrealer at heart, but now living in the Paris region, Caccia continues to draw extensively from his experiences as the son of Italian immigrants. His most recent publication, a book of poems titled *Ti voglio bene* (La Feuille de thé éditions, 2023), is a call-back to his own poetic heritage at the crossroads of three cultures. In his search for self-discovery, Caccia challenges conventional notions of nationality and cultural belonging. Currently, Caccia posts articles on arts and culture on his website, www.fulvio-caccia.com.

Interview

Melfi: You have had a remarkable career. You are the author of six novels, a short story collection, and seven collections of poetry, one of which, *Aknos*, won the coveted Governor General's Award for French-language poetry in 1994. You also published many essays on literature and modern society. Of all the books you have published, which is your favourite? And why?

Caccia: I would say that my favourite work is the one I finished recently. Still in manuscript form, the novel takes up the drama of *The Coincidence* twenty-five years later. This time, I was interested in the way in which the parents' trauma is passed on to their descendants. The working title says it all: *The Repetition*.

I write poetry and novels alternately, as a kind of breathing space. Poetry is more direct; it places the poet's words at the centre of the performance from the outset. The novel moves forward masked. Even if the novelist expresses himself in the first person, he hides behind characters to better grasp the movement of reality, because words are like butterflies: you have to catch them! The writer is an entomologist. He uses his pen or computer keyboard like a net. After catching words, he fixes them by pinning them with conjunctions on a whiteboard, spreading their silky, colourful wings so that they are clearly visible to the reader. The search for surprise and beauty. In poetry, the narrative is implicit, i.e., vertical. In the contemporary novel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is more explicit and horizontal. The great novelists manage to do both by using poetry, i.e., suspending an image or a sensation, to break into the narrative.

Melfi: Of all the books I have read of yours, my own personal favourite is your novel *The Coincidence*, which was translated from the French by Robert Richard and published by Guernica Editions in 2015. The reason this book is my favourite is simple – this work of fiction is, I believe, a literary masterpiece. To my mind, *The Coincidence* is a fusion of the old and the new – it tells a classic, old-school tale of two individuals, romantically linked, and at the same time, their tale showcases this century's brutal inability to give peace a chance. In a nutshell, the novel follows a man and a woman, Jonathan and Leila, who, on the verge of falling in love, discover they will be denied their happily-ever-after as they share an almost incestuous bond. The two are both inexorably linked to the bloody massacre of the fourteen women that occurred at Montreal's École Polytechnique in December of 1989. Victimized by the tragic events that took place on Quebec soil years before they met, the two have no choice but to end their relationship. Here is the question: Are you suggesting that it's impossible, or nearly impossible, for two individuals to love and cherish each other when something – something tragic and unexpected – will inevitably come around and mess things up?

Caccia: The characters of Jonathan and Leila embody two conceptions of life and freedom: fate and destiny. Fate sees our condition (gender, social class, race, etc.) as forever shaping us and directing our lives. Destiny consists of asserting our responsibility to become subject and direct our life, even if the freedom we are granted seems to be inexistent. All I did was put them in an enclosed space and observe them. The result is the intrinsic logic of fiction. The drama they unknowingly share, which draws them together so strongly, will brutally separate them as soon as the violence that gave rise to it is revealed. This reversal, which is the mainspring of tragedy, becomes a catharsis of liberation as soon as it is recounted. It allows readers to identify and recognize themselves.

Melfi: At the start of your novel, the protagonist, Jonathan, comes across as your typical guy on the make. In the middle of the novel, Jonathan does not expect to fall in love, but to his surprise, he does. At the end, Jonathan is wholly transformed by the love he experiences for Leila, so much so that he will do anything – anything – to keep Leila sane. He tricks her into killing him. To your mind, should Jonathan be viewed as a hero for sacrificing his life for the one he loves, or should he be viewed as a brute, a villain, for resorting to violence?

Caccia: Both. Why is he a hero and a bully at the same time? Because he is trapped in the prison of his guilt from which he thought he had escaped when he left Montreal, his hometown, but his fault – his very great fault – catches up with him at home, in Paris, by the strangest of coincidences. The woman in front of him is no longer the subject of his love: she suddenly becomes the representative of all the women he could have saved. He cannot forgive himself. Jonathan realizes that the time has come to pay. To force Leila to become the Angel of Death, he takes her brother's place and exerts the same violence on her that she has endured, and more than that, he becomes the abusive father. It's a violent transfer, but one that is necessary for the tragedy to be fulfilled.

Melfi: At the very end of the book, the reader learns that Jonathan's first love, Clara, was killed by the Polytechnique massacre shooter, who coincidentally happened to be Leila's brother. This is a twist in the story the reader had not expected. It is very disturbing. Is your novel trying to warn the reader, "watch out, no matter how much you may think you can shed off your animal

heritage, you can't"? "Either you are the hunted, or you are the hunter: make a choice"?

Caccia: Reality is never black or white, but movement and transformation. The turning point is the past becoming the present, literally and figuratively. All narration induces this seesaw where the movement is reversed. That's what history is all about, but it's also what tragedy, through myth, makes visible. I wanted to write a modern tragedy. We are both angel and demon; resentment and jealousy can tip us over the edge for the worse. On the other hand, we can be saved by realizing that we are overstepping our limits and abusing our power. This is the meaning and the greatness of the apprenticeship novel, the *Bildungsroman*,[1] but also of the authentic mission of Christianity properly understood. Rabelais, the inventor of the novel, never attacks the figure of Christ, but only his epigones.

Melfi: Your novel is described as "a psychological thriller" on the back cover, though it could also be categorized as "historical fiction," as any literary work whose plot revolves around real historical events, including recent ones, can be considered part of this genre. Unlike a journalist who has to stick to the facts, an author writing historical fiction is allowed to make things up. In your novel, you changed the date of the École Polytechnique massacre from 6 to 9 December, plus you changed the name of the mass killer from Marc Lépine to Thomas Seyyad. According to all reports, Lépine and his real-life sister, Nadia, were not close, but you changed all that in your version of the story. When writing the book, how did you decide what to keep and what to discard? At one point in your book, Jonathan feels so intimately connected to the events that transpired at the École Polytechnique that he thinks of himself as Thomas Seyyad's brother. Do you yourself feel somehow connected to what took place on 6 December 1989? More specifically, if it's not too intrusive a question to ask, do you have a friend or colleague who was killed in the massacre? If you don't have a friend or colleague who was personally affected, what motivated you to write about the horrific events that took place at the École Polytechnique on 6 December 1989?

[1] According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *Bildungsroman* is a "class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically. The German word *Bildungsroman* means 'novel of education' or 'novel of formation'" (https://www.britannica.com/art/bildungsroman).

Caccia: For more than ten years, the École Polytechnique massacre preoccupied me. One question haunted me: Why didn't any of the men present during the shooting do anything to stop the carnage? The old injunction "women and children first" was brutally reversed. I wept with rage, seized by the vertigo of emotion. It took me all that time, ten years, to find the distance to write about it.

I was already in Paris when this tragedy happened. That year, I was taking part in a literary conference where, strangely, some of the potential victims targeted by Lépine (on a list discovered later) were present. Also, it happened at a turning point in my personal life. I had just started my family. My wife and I had recently moved into our flat in Paris; my eldest son had just been born. I was looking for my bearings. And the world was changing. The Berlin Wall had just come down; a new freedom, based on democracy, was now accessible to a greater number of people. I saw, in this fact, the beginnings of a universal transcultural political project, a notion on which I was working with my friends at *Vice Versa* magazine. The Polytechnique tragedy changed everything.

Lépine could very well have been a reader of *Vice Versa*, a trilingual periodical that friends and I created in 1983. He was between two cultures; half Québécois on his mother's side and half Algerian on his father's; he could have become a member of our collective. Art could have saved him in the Christian sense of the word. His act marked the end of the transcultural euphoria, just as the murder of Sharon Tate at the end of the sixties marked the end of the hippy utopia. It was also, in a way, the tragic end of the twentieth century, which ended with both the great liberal euphoria of Berlin and the tragedy of Montreal. It inspired me to invent the anonymous graffiti that opens the novel: "What unites on one side separates on the other. Berlin, 8 November 1989."

I found out quite late that Lépine had a sister. The biographical information I knew about him was minimal. I only knew that his father was a businessman of Algerian origin and that his mother was a nurse from Quebec. I also think that I didn't want to know too much about him so as not to be too influenced.

Melfi: There have been many books and films about the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, but there have been very few books and films about what transpired on 6 December 1989 in Montreal. The only director who tackled the subject was Denis Villeneuve. His film – *Polytechnique* – was released in

2009. It has been described as a film that faithfully recreates the historical events, showing the violence, but not exploiting it. First question: Did you view *Polytechnique* prior to writing your novel? And if you did, did the film in any way influence the plot? Second question: Villeneuve's film ends on an optimistic note, assuring the viewer that despite it all, *la vita è bella.* Your novel clearly arrives at a different conclusion. Can you explain why?

Caccia: I arrived at a different conclusion because I didn't belong to the "clan." So I was perhaps better able to see the tragic and collective dimension of this event than the authorities and the media who didn't want to look at it too closely. To hear them tell it, it was the act of a lone madman whose firearms licence had expired. The immediate focus was on controlling the movement of firearms. Move along, there's nothing to see. Most tragedies begin as a family affair. And like any family tragedy, the one at the École Polytechnique had to be dealt with by a member of the family. Who was I to talk about it? I was still an outsider, who, what's more, lived abroad! The minority reflex took hold. The clan closed the door.

Incidentally, I couldn't possibly have been influenced by Villeneuve's film for the simple reason that it hadn't yet been made. My novel was published in French four years before Villeneuve's film was released. My publisher, Robert Giroux, did send my book to a number of film producers, but got no reply. Silence.

Melfi: Villeneuve's film received many awards, including the Rogers Best Canadian Film Award; your novel should have also received awards and accolades, but alas, it did not. It appears the English translation of the novel did not even get reviewed. Why do you think your book was ignored by the Canadian literary establishment?

Caccia: For a number of prosaic reasons, I should say. In Quebec, my novel received a mixed reception. With the exception of Michel Vézina, who gave it a brief and accurate review during Radio-Canada's *Le téléjournal*, the Quebec critics were rather dismissive. I was criticized for having a narrow vision of feminism.

For English Canada, it was a different matter. I wrote it in French. So I was immediately lumped in with the literature of the "Two Solitudes." Added to that is the fact that I wrote from abroad. I was not the only Canadian author to do so. The great Mavis Gallant, Mordechaï Richler, and even Leonard

Cohen did it. But there's an additional foreignness that comes not from "exile" or "expatriation," but from immigration. This further blurs the perception of my work. What place do I speak of? That's why, according to my perception, when my book came out in English translation, nobody talked about it.

Melfi: Do you believe those who read your novel in translation will get the same experience as those who read it in the original French? I suppose the question is this: Is something lost in translation? Or is something gained (a translator can add colour and texture, enrich it by his or her choice of words, possibly making it superior to the original)? As you are fluent in both French and English, are you satisfied that your novel *The Coincidence* in English translation mirrors perfectly what you wrote in French?

Caccia: I'm not as fluent in English as you might think. So, I'm not in a position to judge the quality of the translation. I would add that my style of writing is willingly elusive. It's difficult to render in English, which remains very descriptive. The "story" in English (i.e., the action) is the main driving force behind the narration. The translator, I think, did his best to match these two opposite dimensions of language. Besides, I was the one who instigated the translation into English. I managed to put together the financial conditions so that my friend Robert Richard could proceed with the translation through a grant from the Canada Council. Has Guernica's new owner made the effort to publicize it? I'd like to think so.

Melfi: Part of the charm of the novel comes from the protagonist's love affair with Paris, the City of Lights. It is perceived as a magical place. Now, it's well known that you were born in Italy and then as a child immigrated to Montreal, Quebec, with your parents; in the late 1980s, you moved to Paris, France, and called it home. The question is: After all these years of living in Paris, do you see yourself as a Parisian, or are you just someone passing by, a tourist, who is amazed by this city's art and architecture? Do you consider yourself an Italian-Québécois writer or do you consider yourself foremost a French writer? Does the fact that you have resided in Paris for decades automatically make you a writer with a European sensibility rather than a North American one? On the other hand, is it possible to make such broad generalisations, i.e., is there such a thing as being a European/North American writer, when it is rather obvious that we are currently living in a global village, albeit a not-so-peaceful one?

Caccia: The first two years I was in Paris, I was pinching myself! I couldn't believe I was there. But then I got used to it. I started to be partly "integrated" into the strongly French normative culture, but I haven't forgotten my host country – Canada – and my Québécois family, mixed in with my Italian one. That's a lot of identities to fit into one person!

What I want is to be recognized simply as a writer who has multiple allegiances without denying any of them. But it's certain that my life in Canada has made me what I am. Canada is a metaphor for the "global village" dear to Marshall McLuhan. The Iroquois etymology of "Kanada" refers to a "gathering place." In this respect, all the citizens of the world are Canadian! That is the fate of our planet if we don't destroy it first.

Melfi: It appears, unless I am mistaken, that in most of your work, both in your novels and in your poetry, you come to the conclusion, as does Leila in *The Coincidence*, that, "Me, I don't exist." Would you say that one of the main themes you explore is that of identity, or rather the lack thereof? As a child of immigrants, and as an individual who chose to live abroad, has this affected your view of who you are, or more specifically, who you are not? Now, as an older individual, do you feel your identity shaped, or is it still somewhat shapeless? Do you write in order to help shape your identity, or do you write in order to prove to yourself that you exist? The mirror can tell you that, yes, you do exist in real time, but it cannot provide form and content to what cannot be seen. Does your writing mirror back all the characters you invented and assure you that you are a combination of all of them, rather than a lost soul?

Caccia: Yes, it does. Identity is a construction that we inherit. Our individual consciousness is the fruit of our four-fold Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian heritage. To this Western heritage, we can add all the others that we are more or less conscious of. To defuse the past of its overly lyrical or negative charge, the authentic writer must intervene, like a surgeon, at the root of the bones; find the appropriate language to symbolize and transport the emotional experience onto the level of narrative. It is in this sense that the ego does not exist as such. It must be unravelled by the ability to see oneself as others.

Melfi: In your short story "The Lady with Fur," which you translated from French and which was recently published in the online journal *The Antonym*, you describe the emotional problems that Kassal, the protagonist, is having

navigating through life. Kassal thinks of himself as a failure. Not only has he just had a baby with a woman whom he is no longer in love with, but it appears he can't find "the woman with fur" who might, just might, instill him with hope that life is worth living. Consumed with rage, he smashes a box and hurts his hand and nearly bleeds to death. In both *The Coincidence* and "The Lady with Fur," the protagonists resort to self-harm. Why is this so? Few individuals, if any, would admit that feminism has, in part, emasculated men. Still, the question can be asked: Have the gender wars hurt men more than women?

Caccia: It's more complex. Each one of us is a divided, shared entity, because at birth we are separated from our mother's body. Language is a way of making up for and naming this lack. This is how the child begins to speak. We could say that throughout our lives we try to make up for this lack that is also within us: being is nothingness. In situations of crisis or sudden transformation, when a person feels fragile, they can quickly feel threatened. And they want to return to their original state. That's what happened to Lépine, who took back his mother's name. Today we are living through one crisis after another. Our times demand that we understand that power must be shared and limited. For three millennia, religious and then civil laws have laid the foundations. Now we have to learn to extend it to the other living beings on our planet (the flora and fauna, our rivers, our seas, etc.). This is the ecological revolution. People will feel all the freer for it.

Melfi: The reason both "The Lady with Fur" and *The Coincidence* are such enjoyable reads has less to do with what the stories are about and more to do with their use of language. The poetic turn of phrase employed is simply breathtaking – it captures the rage and despair of the characters involved beautifully; actually, it transforms the rage and despair into something else, something less frightening and monstrous. The question is: Do you see yourself more of a poet than a prose writer? Or are both roles one and the same?

Caccia: Yes, I'm one of those who think that poetry is the driving force behind storytelling. Northrop Frye said that prose was born from poetry, which was the first literary genre in the Bible. Authentic fiction never forgets its poetic origins. I have tried to keep this link alive by combining the one with the other. I have exemplified this in a novel entitled *La frontière tatouée*, where a poem opens the novel. Each verse then becomes the title of a short chapter.

Melfi: In the preface to your first collection of selected poems (Guernica Editions, 2000), you wrote that you were "involved in a passionate quest for a homeland" and that you struggled "to slough off the yoke of alienation" that immigration was in part responsible for, creating "otherness."[2] You also suggested that your poetry went against the grain – Québécois poetry at the time was "engaged in making its presence felt," whereas your own poetry went in the opposite direction. You stated, and I quote, "I was like a mirror that reflected back to the Quebecois the image they feared the most: fragmented identity."[3] Now, two decades later, would you still appraise the situation in the same way? Are native-born Québécois poets, generally speaking, sure of who they are, but those like yourself, who come from elsewhere, not?

Caccia: Yes. Quebec writers, like Quebecers in general, have gained self-confidence. They have acquired maturity and a capacity to tell their own stories, which they lacked fifty years ago. This is clearly visible in their cinema, which today is the envy of other great nations. Quebecers have finally understood that their geopolitical position means they can take the best from both the francophone world and the anglophone one. But to do so, they still need to develop a strong critical culture – a freedom of reception – that will enable them to better assert their freedom of expression. This double articulation also concerns migrant writers, as it does for all minorities. It lies at the heart of *Vice Versa*'s transcultural project. So, it's hardly surprising that it is the main challenge of the twenty-first century.

Melfi: In regard to your poetry, the critic D.G. Jones noted that while you may have "changed countries, changed languages," you still work "within the classic tradition of the larger family of Romance languages and literature."[4] Has the work of Italian poets, such as Ungaretti, Montale, and Pavese, been more of an influence than American-born poets? On the other hand, is it possible to categorize poets by their nationality? Isn't a poet's style independent of his country of origin?

Caccia: For me, poetry that mattered most when I was young was written by Quebec poets gathered around Hexagone Editions. It was a great moment in poetry, even superior to what was going on in France at the same time.

[2] Caccia, *Selected Poems*, 7.

[3] Caccia, *Selected Poems*, 7.

[4] Jones, "Forward," 8.

Incidentally, it was the poet Gaston Miron, leader of this movement, who introduced me to contemporary Italian poetry and literature. That shows the generosity and open-mindedness of that generation of poets, most of whom have now disappeared. Miron wanted to see me as a "Quebec poet." He wasn't wrong because I wrote in French. But French is, for me, "a writing language" that cannot be reduced to a nationality. That's the problem with minority nations that have to collectively assert their differences in order to survive, literally and figuratively. That's what happened during the war in the Balkans. It is what is happening today in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This aggressed country is in the process of decolonizing itself from Russian influence.

Melfi: In an essay on your work published in *Ellipse* back in 1995, Robert Giroux remarked that you have "shown great sensitivity to the immigrant's condition."[5] He also found that your Governor General's Award–winning poetry book, *Aknos*, revolved around three major themes, or rather quests: first, the quest for identity; second, the quest for language or expression; and "the third but no less important and constantly resurfacing, the quest for love."[6] Would you say that these three quests resurface in your later books of poems? Do they also come into play in your most recent collection, *Ti voglio bene*?

Caccia: Poetry is the first language we hear as children. It is the oral and popular language that Dante was to elevate by writing it down as the language of love. This language of love is not assigned to a place or a country; it is common to all cultures and languages without belonging to any one in particular. This is no more and no less than the definition given by Dante in the fourteenth century.[7] It is still valid today.
My latest poem is a form of reconciliation with the various affiliations that make me up. Instead of hiding my mother, my mother tongue, my motherland, I need to bring it out into the open.

Melfi: In his book of essays, *Ancient Memories, Modern Identities*, Filippo Salvatore suggests that you have a love and hate of your native culture. He writes, "Italy becomes the synonym of the omnipresent mother of Origin […]

[5] Giroux, "Mythic Temptation," 11–13.
[6] Giroux, "Mythic Temptation," 19.
[7] Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

The poet's desire to erase his memories of the ancient Mother (Italy) becomes a duel, and at the same time constitutes the thread for his journey toward liberation […] The price Caccia has to pay for ridding himself of the memory of his original Italian past is the discovery of solitude and sorrow."[8] Would you say that now, at this point in your life, you have liberated yourself from being Italian? Or would you say that, on the contrary, you have decided you have no need to liberate yourself from "being Italian," as this is an authentic part of who you are? After all, you did just release a book of poems titled *Ti voglio bene* in the language of Dante.

Caccia: I'll be less assertive than Filippo Salvatore in this respect, who nonetheless made a fair analysis of my state of mind. *Irpinia*, my first collection, immediately asserts my native land. This movement is an alternative.

Melfi: Looking back at your career, would you say that you achieved what you set out to do? Also, looking back, is there anything you would do differently? Given your wealth of experience, what would you tell the young Fulvio Caccia to watch out for? Would you assure him that his fragmented identity – Italian-Canadian-European – will not hamper his success, but will rather contribute to it?

Caccia: I'd tell him to choose a genre and a profession that are detached from literature proper, so that he could earn a better living.

Melfi: As very little is written about your private life (your Wikipedia page says nothing of your marital status), is it fair to say that even though you write about the secret lives of others, you yourself will not reveal any of your own secrets? As a writer, do you feel it is important to hide behind a mask? A mask of civility?

Caccia: I owe everything to Aline, my wife, and, to some extent, to my two children. They have helped me to be what I am and to reassure me of my own existence! A writer has to go forward masked. I don't believe in "autofiction," because you always write about yourself. All the more reason to remain hidden. The challenge for me now is to become a truly foreign writer, literally and figuratively. That means writing in a foreign language other than French.

[8] Salvatore, *Ancient Memories*, 110–111.

The French I use is inevitably laced with archaisms and Québécoisisms, for which some French friends kindly point out that I write in a regional language! O sweet!

Melfi: Dare I ask: What is on your bucket list?

Caccia: As a writer, I'm always making lists! Let's start with the first action I've finally taken:

- updated my website (My creative activities are duly listed, with a particular focus on my books. Here's the site: www.fulvio-caccia.com.)
- continue writing my "Family Novel," and
- finally become an authentic transcultural writer!

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