

# Narratives of *Nostos* by Italian-Canadian Women

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*Abstract:* We are privileged to read and write and share narratives of *nostos* that are inspired by our (grand)parents' decision to emigrate. The return journey "home" shows a need to look to the past, towards one's roots, in an attempt to better understand the present. This essay looks at representations of *nostos* in the Italian-Canadian literary community, with an emphasis on narratives by women who were born in Italy as well as those whose (grand)parents emigrated to Canada. To varying degrees, the discussion will touch on the works of established and emerging authors from Ontario, Quebec and Alberta.

*Keywords:* Italian, Canadian, women, writers, heritage, return, *nostos*

Canadians of Italian origin have certainly contributed to the shaping of our nation's literary landscape. Whether they write poetry, short stories or nonfiction, the children and grandchildren of first-generation Italian immigrants are visibly connected to their origins. Italian-Canadian writers, of different generations, have dealt with the concept of *nostos* (the return home) at specific moments of their literary careers. Edmonton author Caterina Edwards, however, is well known for writing narratives of *nostos* throughout her literary career, including *The Lion's Mouth* (1982), *Finding Rosa* (2008), *The Sicilian Wife* (2015), and her recent story "Claudia" (2018). Edwards' narratives pull at the heartstrings.

As a writer, I can identify with the themes that preoccupy Edwards; and as a reader, I am sensitive to the experiences of her characters. I was four, in 1967, when I was uprooted from cozy Cavarzere (in the province of Venezia) and began a new life in a tiny basement apartment in Montreal-North. I have spent five decades returning to that warm setting, imagining and writing about what my life would have been if I had grown up in Italy. I spent summers in Italy because my parents wanted their children to know their grandparents. I have a deep connection to my Italian roots, and I am Canadian. As I said in a 2011 interview with Laura Sanchini, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, "I need to go back. I need to see the Adige... I need to see the old homestead, even though there's nobody there." (Sanchini 2011) I don't know what kind of person I would have been if I had stayed in Italy. Would I have gone to university? Would I have chosen a career in the arts? I do know, however, that I am the person that I am today

because I was raised in Canada, and because I am attached to Italy. My roots are in Italy and that necessarily informs my personal and professional life choices, including the essays, the poems and the stories that I choose to write. One of those stories, "Refuge in the Vineyard" (Canton 2018), is a narrative of *nostos* with the characters and the action shifting between a vineyard in northern Italy (where the patriarch has returned after half a lifetime in Canada) and suburban Montreal (where his diligent daughter resides with her husband and their four small children).

My personal story is similar to that of many immigrants, including my literary peers: a loved one left his or her birthplace decades ago so that we could have a better home, a better education, a better future... We are the beneficiaries of that better future: we are privileged to read and write and share narratives of *nostos* that are inspired by our (grand)parents' decision to emigrate. In his article "The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature," Joseph Pivato writes that the return journey is "an obsession in the Italian-Canadian imagination" (170). The return journey "home" shows a need to look to the past, towards one's roots, in an attempt to better understand the present. What does it mean to be Canadian and to wish to return to the country of origin or homeland? How do Canadian writers illustrate *nostos*, and specifically the return (physical or symbolic), in contemporary narratives? This essay looks at representations of *nostos* in the Italian-Canadian literary community, with an emphasis on narratives by women who were born in Italy as well as those whose (grand)parents emigrated to Canada. To varying degrees, the discussion will touch on the works of established and emerging authors from Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. These writers include Elizabeth Cinello, Marisa De Franceschi, Terri Favro, Venera Fazio, Darlene Madott, Gianna Patriarca, Delia De Santis, Elettra Bedon, Linda Morra, Maria Francesca LoDico, Liana Cusmano, Rosetta Rosati and Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli.

The early works of Italian-Canadian authors have often dealt with the theme of immigration and the concept of *nostos*. For a few, like Edwards and Darlene Madott, *nostos* is an integral component of their writing as a whole. As a literary community, too, Italian Canadians have sought opportunities to reconnect with, and return to, our country of origin. In 1986, the Association of Italian Canadian Writers (AICW) was founded in Vancouver. In many ways, that need, that yearning to connect with like-minded creative and literary people is a representation of the desire to return to our roots. In 2004, the tenth biennial gathering of the AICW was held at the University of Udine. In 2010, the thirteenth conference was held in Atri (Teramo), the sixteenth in Padula (Salerno) in 2016, while the eighteenth will be held in Torino in 2020. Furthermore, the theme of the Atri conference, and the title of the publication which resulted from the literary readings and scholarly presentations, was *Writing Our Way Home*. And the volume *Writing Our Way Home* (2013), opens with Elena Lamberti's introduction describing a slow train ride towards Atri, thereby setting the stage for multiple and

varied representations of *nostos*. Over 50 writers and academics reconnected with their homeland and were inspired by the theme itself to discuss creativity, research and scholarship. Clearly, for the non-Italian residents who went to Atri, it was an emotional and fruitful representation of the return, both on the physical and intellectual level. Eight years later, in the 2018 volume *People, Places, Passages*, Jim Zuccherro reflects on this 2010 collective return in his essay "I Remember... Dining Under the Olden Arches, in Roccamorice, Italy, June 2010."

The volume *People, Places, Passages*, edited by Giulia De Gasperi, Delia De Santis and Caroline Morgan Di Giovanni, appeared in April 2018. The volume is dedicated to Venera Fazio (1946-2017), author and former president of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. As co-editor Giulia De Gasperi states in the Preface, "When our colleague Venera Fazio shared her idea for an anthology celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers, I had no hesitation: I immediately volunteered to be on the editorial board. I felt from the very beginning that the resulting volume was going to be a milestone in the history of the Association and in Canadian literature" (17). Venera Fazio was the initiator of this landmark volume and initially one of the editors. Unfortunately, she passed away before its publication. *People, Places, Passages* is Venera Fazio's legacy. The volume, which juxtaposes the writing of multiple generations, is the most comprehensive collection yet of Canadian writing by authors who have roots in Italy. It includes short stories, poems, creative nonfiction and memoirs, as well as excerpts of longer works such as novels and plays. The texts appear mostly in English, but also in French, Italian, and dialect. With its 98 contributors (53 of them women) who span several generations of writers (from award-winning writers such as Pier Giorgio Di Cicco and Mary di Michele to youngsters who have just begun an artistic career such as Andrew Andreoli and Liana Cusmano), *People, Places, Passages* confirms that a community can be completely integrated and fully identify as Canadian while proudly acknowledging its heritage. As Francesco D'Arelli (Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Montreal), writes in the "Foreword." "They identify as writers first and foremost and they are Canadian," as the subtitle "An Anthology of Canadian Writing" clearly indicates, "but there is a great deal of Italy in this volume. This is undeniable... the children and grandchildren of Italy, now Canadian authors, have not forgotten their origins" (*People, Places, Passages* 15-16).

Many contemporary Canadian authors of Italian origin have strong ties to their heritage. Some may return to Italy regularly; others may have returned only once. Still others may have never been to Italy. Still, the theme of the return is present within the pages of *People, Places, Passages*. It is present in multiple genres, and remains an important issue across the generations of writers. It appears as a physical return to Italy as well as a return via memory and a societal return to traditions, as Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli describes in "Product of Italy/Made in Canada." Often, that which the children of immigrants desperately wanted to

reject in their youth, they reconnect with as adults. We "return to the traditions we were taught...We try out our mother's old recipes...We enrol our children in Italian lessons" (153).

In Linda M. Morra's "The Fig Tree of Monteleone," the narrator accompanies her father to Italy, his first return in almost sixty years: "...by the time he decided to return, there were well under a thousand people left" (158) in his hometown of Monteleone. As the narrator says, "It was less common, though, to take so long to make the return journey home: it was unusual that he had taken sixty years" (158). When the narrator asks why it had taken six decades to return to the homeland, the father replies, "Because it was hard enough to leave the first time" (158).

Vincenzo Pietropaolo's "Meditation," too, is a reflection on the narrator's father, his life (45 years lived in Italy, and 45 in Canada) and his passing: "...in my mind I travelled far into the distant past, to the daily ritual of my father arriving home after a day of work as a construction labourer..." (167). Pietropaolo gives a detailed and moving description of his father's first return to his hometown when World War II ended:

[...] the young soldier, Paolo, found himself in Friuli, in northern Italy, discharged from the army. To get home to the deep south, in Calabria, he rode the rails. Much of the time he had to walk, following the bombed and useless railway tracks, foraging in fields and seeking shelter in abandoned farmhouses. He always said how difficult it was to walk along those railway tracks, as the ties were spaced too closely together for one comfortable step, yet were too far apart to skip one in a long stride. He had an engagement to keep: marry Carmela. Their marriage, which had been abruptly postponed by the outbreak of war, would eventually last sixty-one years. (166)

War, and its inevitable scars, is also recounted in Ernesto Carbonelli's "Firminia's Story" (*People, Places, Passages* 83). Here, the symbolic return occurs through memory and the recounting of events as a way of healing: Firminia unburdens herself by narrating (and thereby reliving) the atrocities of war, just before passing away, as if she needed to return to that time of darkness in order to die in peace. In a different representation of the return, in her personal essay "The 70-Year March to 'Angel of Petawawa'" (*People, Places, Passages* 124), Terri Favro recalls her connection to the Italian-Canadian literary community by revisiting her story "Angel of Petawawa" (*Behind Barbed Wire*, 2012), a fictionalized account of her father's journey home during the internment of Italians in Canada. He was not an internee but a soldier at the camp. He was in the privileged position of watching over the internees who were not able to return to their families, a forced separation, preventing them from returning to their everyday lives. Favro's essay in *People, Places, Passages* is a reflection on (a symbolic return) her post-war narrative which describes her father's urgent return to his own home, for he is soon to be a father, to Teresa... better known today as the author Terri Favro.

The first person narrator in Delia De Santis' short story "Coming of Age" is saddened when her best friend, Morena (the person who

befriended her in the schoolyard when she first arrived in Canada), permanently returns to live in Italy with her family. Interestingly, in "Searching for Home," Rosetta Rosati narrates a return to her mother's birthplace in Canada. The author was born in Italy to a Canadian-born mother, whose parents had immigrated to Canada in the early 1900s. As an adult, Rosati's mother returned to Canada with a husband and two daughters. And so, the author was raised and educated in Montreal. Then, once she got married, she returned to a life in Italy to be with her retired parents. "Searching for Home" describes the journey to Sault Ste. Marie to look for the house where her mother was born.

As co-editor Giulia De Gasperi explains in the Preface to *People, Places, Passages*, Section I "is dedicated to the Association and contains articles, essays and memoirs that survey its founding in 1986 and its evolution to the present day." The first section of the volume is in fact a revisiting of the birth of the AICW. This section of the volume presents contributions by founders and early members: Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's "The Birth of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers," Anna Foschi Ciampolini's "The Year of the Awakening, 1986," followed by Nino Ricci's "From There to Here in 30 Years," Carmelo Militano's "AICW Memoir" and Francesco Loriggio's "Preliminary Notes for a Future History of Italian Canadian Literature (2017)." In his "Revisiting the Scene of the Crime," Joseph Pivato reflects on the making of the first newsletter of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. He essentially deconstructs and explains each section of that first issue, arguably revisiting the choices he made as the first newsletter editor and founding president of the Association.

For the first-generation immigrant, particularly as represented in fiction, the return journey home is both nostalgic and validating: it serves to strengthen the ties with the old country and shows that wealth and success have been acquired in the new land, thereby justifying emigration. For the children of immigrants, such as authors Caterina Edwards and Marisa De Franceschi, and their characters (Bianca Mazzin in *The Lion's Mouth* and Margaret Croff in *Surface Tension*), the return journey is oriented towards the inner self, an essential step in the heroine's quest for identity. In *The Lion's Mouth*, Bianca experiences the return through the creative act of writing a novel about her cousin Marco. As Pivato points out, "The novel is an imaginative return trip to Bianca's Venice. In this way this Canadian heroine can learn about Venice, about Marco, and most of all about herself" (174). In Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* and De Franceschi's *Surface Tension*, the narration of the past is necessary to clarify the present: the return journey through childhood, adolescence and early adulthood is necessary for each of the protagonists to answer questions about herself. Whereas Edwards' Bianca Mazzin tells the story of unrequited love of her cousin, Marisa De Franceschi's illustration of the return in *Surface Tension* is much darker. On the flight to Italy as a teenager, Margaret is molested by the passenger sitting next to her. As a young adult, she returns to Italy and gets pregnant, then raises the child in Canada as someone else's. In real life,

too, De Franceschi recounts her abysmal return to Italy in 2018 when her purse is stolen, leaving her without a passport or identification. (Email correspondence, July 2018). She spends months reclaiming her identity once she is back in Canada.

Gianna Patriarca wrote about a similar experience in her essay "Italy in Lockdown" (2012). Having a "trusting and perhaps slightly naive personality," Patriarca befriended "a woman and her young daughters at the train station" who later stole her wallet. She was left with her "Canadian smile," "wounded ego and the damn heavy suitcases." Patriarca had returned to her "homeland wanting to find the romance of memory, the romance of history and the mirage of youth," but in the "real Italy" she is in "the rank" of "the invisible": a "*fessa*" and "a perfect target, a victim of any activity less than honourable and easily dismissed by attendants, waiters and anyone in the business of being polite." Patriarca writes: "The realization of being a stranger in the country I have loved in my memory for 50 years was more than sad, it was heartbreaking." (*Accenti*, Fall 2012)

Contrary to Edwards, De Franceschi and Patriarca who arrived in Canada as children, Montreal Italian-language writer Elettra Bedon came to Canada in the 1980s, with her husband Nico Bignami and two adolescent-children, leaving behind two adult children. She has never called herself an immigrant. For as long as she was physically able to, she returned every year to visit her father. Her connection to Italy is deeper and more recent than those who left the land in their youth. In "*Ritorno a Padova*" (translated as "Return to Padua"), Elettra Bedon describes her voyage home to her beloved Padova, that last stretch filled with anticipation after she has landed, from the moment she arrives at Venice's Marco Polo Airport to her father's street. In moving, poetic prose she illustrates collecting her suitcase at the arrivals carousels, dragging it to the "teller" where she buys "a bus ticket" and getting on a bus with tourists. She does this "almost automatically, every year, usually in the same period: end of April, first days of May." The bus from the airport enters the long bridge on the lagoon, stops at Piazzale Roma, in Venice. Once off the highway it enters Padova, where she takes a taxi to her father's house. As the narrator moves from one phase to the next of the last stretch of the return home, slowly inching her way to her father's abode for the annual visit, she becomes "used to my mother ton. "My Padua'gue" and begins to "feel at home." There is that necessary switching over from North American to Italian ways, that takes a little while, perhaps the same time it takes to get over jetlag and reconnecting with the familiar: "The people's languid drawl has an hypnotic effect on me: I'm not sleeping, I'm not awake, I'm day-dreaming" (Bedon, "My Padua").

Toronto writer Elizabeth Cinello, too, illustrates the return to the land of her birth. Cinello was born in Udine in 1958, and her family emigrated to Canada when she was one. We will remember the lyrical prose in her short story "Food Companion Wanted" (2013) where the concept of *nostos* is represented through the yearning of food and the authentic way it was prepared in the old country. In her brief memoir "My Trip

Home" (2016), Cinello illustrates the tense relationship with her parents which leads to her return to Italy at fifteen, in 1974: "With a hot Toronto summer on the horizon, there was no telling what kind of trouble a brooding restless teen would get into. 'Let's send her away,' she whispered to my father, '*al païs*' (to the village), in Friuli, for the summer. We'll have to borrow money to pay for the trip but a thousand pairs of eyes watching over her is better than just our two'" (42). The fifteen-year-old spends her summer in the quiet town of Varmo, in northern Italy, "near the Tagliamento river with vineyards and cornfields that cuddle up to seventeenth-century farmhouses" (44). Her "no-nonsense grandmother," her father's mother, "lived by herself and had no phone and no television" (44). The return to a more simple rural life, where her grandmother "tended her vegetable garden and she looked after her chickens and rabbits" (44) gives her a clearer perspective of her parents and their roots in Italy, and a better understanding of "home."

That same return to rural simplicity in an Italian setting is narrated by Darlene Madott, in her nonfiction story "On Leave-Taking and Monuments" (*Accenti*, Spring 2007): "From the cultivated fields of the Villa Giovannini, I gather tomatoes and a leafy green vegetable, like kale." That setting equates to a sense of home for the narrator's partner, Warren, whose ancestors left Italy a long time ago: "three brothers left Lucca with their father ... five generations ago." "Home," Madott writes, "is also the word Warren has used to return to the Villa Giovannini, where we have had wine and broken bread together on the white ornamental iron table in the walled garden, surrounded by potted lemon trees in full fruit-'home' in a deeper sense." Both the narrator and her man are completely immersed in the rural setting of Villa Giovannini, in Lucca, where they return with the objective of tracing his ancestry. "On Leave-Taking and Monuments" describes the return "home" of Warren who, in Madott's own words, intends to "dig down" into his ancestry: "My Warren Giovannini, five generations later, will return to Lucca with me." They set up house in Villa Giovannini, where the owner "has told me I can take whatever I want from her gardens—peaches, pears, herbs, tomatoes." Away from urban Toronto and professional responsibilities, Madott is completely immersed in the rural and culinary activities that heighten the senses: "I make a pasta sauce, first chopping up the fennel, garlic, and blanching this in extra virgin olive oil. The resident farmer who tends her olive grove makes Lucia's olive oil. I have boiled the skin off the fresh tomatoes that dropped into my open hands, still warm from the vine, and chopped them into the pot with garlic and fennel and added some pesto from the jar, salt, *peperoncino*, fresh basil from her garden."

By using Canadian settings, too, *nostos* is illustrated through the description of rural tasks and activities which connect characters to the homeland. In such stories as Delia De Santis' "A Special Day" and Terri Favro's "Imaginary Friends," the narrator digs deep into memories to depict a certain kind of man: the tiller of the land. De Santis describes the planting of trees (*Italian Canadians at Table*, 193) as a figurative rep-

resentation of *nostos*. In "Imaginary Friends," Terri Favro describes a similar "old country man": the narrator's grandfather who grows grapes to make his own wine... (*Exploring Voice*, 161). Both De Santis' and Favro's elderly characters have a love and connection to the land, and when they persist in undertaking rural activities, they are in fact figuratively returning to their land of origin. For instance, Favro's Nonno Johnny had not always lived with the narrator's family, but he had come to spend "his final days growing grapes and pressing them into bitter, purple wine..." (*EV*, 162). Thus, when the physical return to Italy is not possible in the golden years of one's life, rural activities in a Canadian setting are a substitute.

In "The Disappearing Sicily" (*Accenti*, Summer 2007) Maria Francesca LoDico thinks back to her father's heart attack and his unexpected death. He was found "in the garden by the vegetable seedlings they had just bought at Marché Jean-Talon": "He had been puttering away in quiet solitude, the parsley still in plastic planters, juttings of curly red-leaf lettuce in Styrofoam, the cherry tomatoes not yet bursting, aubergines not yet pregnant. The basil, taken indoors in winter, was already releasing its sweet fragrance in a wine barrel that had been sawed in half." The opening scene is the elan to describe her father's return to Sicily, to be by his dying mother's bedside and later to attend her funeral. His lament: "I should never have left you. I should have come back when it was possible."

Julia's "coming home" is at the crux of Liana Cusmano's short story "Matters of Great Unimportance," and the short film adaptation by the same name. In the film *Matters of Great Unimportance*, as in the short story, *nostos* is represented through the narration of a love triangle: two friends are in love with the same woman but neither belongs to the right social class. The narrative is about struggling to be accepted and letting go of other people's standards and expectations. When Julia, Alex's close friend and love interest, returns home after having studied abroad, a series of flashbacks illustrates the need to revisit the past in order to move forward.

As the father in Linda Morra's nonfiction text clearly states, it is very difficult to leave one's homeland. It took him sixty years to return "home" because he did not want to relive the pain at the end of his visit, "Because it was hard enough to leave the first time" (158). One of the most heart-wrenching depictions of leaving loved ones a second time, after having returned home to Italy, is narrated in "On Leave-Taking and Monuments." Darlene Madott movingly describes the pain that is "leaving" without an expected return. The author-narrator asks, "What did it take to leave country and home in those days facing years of separation and distant prospect of return—an extraordinary journey for the time?" Madott describes the experience of her "maternal grandmother, Nicolina Leone," who "returned to Vita in Sicily, only once, for the death and burial of her father. She stayed almost a year, accompanied by her two small children, infants under five. She had returned to keep vigil over her dying father and then, upon his death, over his widow,

her stepmother." When the time comes to leave the town of Vita, to return to North America, the two women cannot let go of each other. As the stepdaughter and her children leave in the horse-drawn wagon, the stepmother runs at the wagon's side:

For miles, the stepmother ran. And my grandmother would stop the driver and get down and embrace the old woman, and her stepmother would embrace my grandmother and the children she was certain never to see again. And for as many miles as she could bear, it went on like this, with the old woman running beside the cart, weeping, and the cart stopping and everyone getting out, embracing, weeping, and back in again—struggling to say goodbye in a way the adult women knew to be final. Until at last, the old woman stood still in the dusty road and watched, as they passed out of sight on the road to Palermo, and then to Naples, to the boat that would take them across the ocean, forever. (Accenti 2007)

Darlene Madott writes of a time when travel was by horse-drawn wagon. She is sensitive to the fact that her ancestors left Italy knowing that returning home was highly unlikely. She wonders at the strength and courage of those people: "How do you do that, part when you know you will never, ever, see the object of your love, again?" (Accenti 2007)

To reiterate Pivato above, the return is an "obsession" in Madott's literary production. In Madott's early story "The Florentine Portrait," Francesca's boyfriend is Adam(o) and "Francesca knows her father loves Adam, the fact that he is from Italy, and educated, has not lost the language" (EV, 221). In fact, "her father sees Adam as a return to their roots..." (EV, 221). Many of Madott's stories describe the return from the perspective of a tourist. Her story "Afternoon in a Garden of the Palazzo Barberini," describes a much younger narrator named Francesca, who definitely looks like a North American tourist "in her khaki shorts"... "bobby socks and runners" and "visor, like a half ball-cap." She is *l'americana* in search of a painting. And in "Cycling in Sardegna," (Accenti 2012) an older Francesca travels to Sardegna with her adult son to join a cycling tour. Madott is the daughter of Canadian-born parents and she does not speak Italian even though she uses the occasional Italian word in her stories, often indicating that she is surprised at her knowledge of these words.

In the autobiographical story "Touching Calabria (A Short Story in Little Time)," Madott illustrates the return in several ways. In the main narrative, a daughter is painting with her 92-year-old father. They are "Sunday painting": "sitting in the metal lawn chairs in the Woodbridge basement, staring at our canvases." Woodbridge is the district in Canada that, according to the last census, has the greatest number of people who identify as being of Italian heritage. The narrator-daughter is painting "the central piazza of Tropea, Calabria, from a photograph taken on my trip the summer before..." Her father's subject is "a landscape of his mother's mountain village, Jesuite." The father and daughter have chosen to paint Italian locations that mean something to them

personally, thereby undertaking a return via their paintbrushes. In fact, the narrator is painting an emotional physical return as she narrates her trip to Italy, with her man, the previous year: "An errand had driven us off course, and we arrived at Montalto Uffugo, in the mountains of Calabria, at about four o'clock in the afternoon." One of the women they ask for information is *signora* Francesca, who "had lived in Canada, raised a family there, and was now returned." The narrator also recounts her visit to Jesuite, the place her father is painting in the present, the town where her Canadian-born mother has roots. Jesuite, she had gone to see it the previous year when she travelled with her man, Warren. The narrator's mother says, "Your grandfather walked seven kilometres between villages, every Sunday to court your grandmother... To think, you were *there*..." The narrator clearly places herself in Italy when she says: "I had stood on the road in San Vincenzo, overlooking the valley, listening to the sound of men hammering, constructing new out of old... In San Vincenzo, with its men on rooftops or scaling scaffolding, I took a picture of my grandmother's town, tucked and secretive across the valley, almost hidden in the dense dark growth." In Madott's "Touching Calabria," the return is also represented in an old photo that the narrator describes in the present: "A young Rosina stands beside the chair on which Rosario sits, her left hand placed delicately on his broad shoulder. His eyes, dark as the shells of roasted chestnuts, stare with male confidence at the camera. Everything of my grandmother's face has faded in this photograph, except her eyes, doe eyes, soft and fearful. Her mouth has vanished into sepia silence, a silence that seems to go on, forever." (Accenti 2014)

Venera Fazio, author of *The Fabric of My Soul* (2016), was born in Bafia, Sicily. As a child, she immigrated to Canada with her parents and brother. She died in Bright's Grove, Ontario, in December 2017. Venera Fazio was not only a Canadian author with Italian roots, she was also a cultural agent of the literary community and worked with authors from around the world. A poet, essayist and short story writer, Fazio's literary production was inspired by her Sicilian heritage. With friend and co-editor Delia De Santis, Fazio published two volumes of writings connected to Sicily: *Sweet Lemons: Writings with a Sicilian Accent* (2004) and *Sweet Lemons II: International Writings with a Sicilian Accent* (2010).

In her personal essay "On Writing and Dreaming," Fazio states that for many years she hid her ethnicity. She realized later that she could only become a writer by "returning" to her Sicilian heritage: "My culture of origin is my Muse" (*Exploring Voice*, 176). Thus, for Fazio, the return journey involves reclaiming her Italian name and acknowledging her roots in Sicily, as well as reconnecting with relatives in her hometown of Bafia (as she clearly explains in her poem "Zio Carlo"). In 2013, with her husband and granddaughter, Fazio travelled to Sicily, where she read her poetry at the University of Kore in Enna. There, Venera Fazio reclaimed the voice that had been silenced when she arrived in Canada as a child. She found her voice through writing but also through social and cultural activism, thus enabling others to find a

voice. Venera Fazio devoted her literary career to reconnecting to her heritage. In essence Fazio's *nostos* is represented through the literary projects she chose, the anthologies she edited, the authors she featured, etc. Venera Fazio's return journey home includes her dedication to nurturing stories, her own and those of her peers.

In a 2017 interview, Fazio states that her poem "Zio Carlo" is her favourite, the one she is the most proud of, because it allowed her to reconnect with estranged relatives. That poem is itself a narrative of *nostos* which describes Carlo's return home. He is sent back to Italy because he is "broken" and eventually dies in an asylum. The tragic figure of Carlo recalls another young man and his narrative of *nostos*. Toronto author Terri Favro and her artist husband Ron Edding are currently working on a literary project to piece together the multiple returns of a relative, Vigio Favro. In the essay, "The Short and Tragic Life of Vigio Pietro Favro: Recreating a Lost Life in Words and Images," they explain their efforts to understand what happened when Vigio returned to Italy after having lived a short period in Canada. In 2015, on their own return trip to Favro's ancestral hometown, they discovered Vigio Favro's grave in a cemetery in Meana Di Susa, in northwestern Italy. Vigio was born in Bracebridge, Ontario, in 1912 but raised in Italy. At 17 he returned to Canada "to build a new life in the birth country he left as an infant" (93). But after an unknown unfortunate incident, he returned to Italy "a broken young man. He could have been no older than 18" (98). His life in both countries "was a series of tragedies, ending with his death at the hands of German troops occupying the Susa Valley in 1944." (Edding and Favro, *Italian Canadiana*). Favro and Edding are working on a graphic novel based on Vigio's life, which he lived on the margins. They suspect that Vigio was gay and/or mentally unstable: "Something about Vigio displeased his sisters: at one point, they attempted to have Vigio committed to what sounds like a mental institution when he was still only an adolescent" (96-7). Both Vigio and Fazio's Zio Carlo were sent back home to Italy because they were "broken." Both men died tragically because of that forced return. Through their writing, Fazio and Favro/Edding seek to understand the tragic consequences of a relative's return. It would appear that for some immigrants, mental instability led to a forced return to the homeland. Rina Del Nin Cralli, author of *From Friuli* (2015), alludes to mental instability caused by the yearning for home in her poem "Homesickness and Tulips": "Homesick and with no money,/I would cry in bed at night./... I only wanted to/go back home./I was so depressed and/full of homesickness that I was/tempted to do something insane" (*People, Places, Passages*, 471).

Whereas writers like Terri Favro and Darlene Madott were born in Canada, others such as Caterina Edwards and Elizabeth Cinello came to Canada as children. But whether they were born in Italy or not, their writing explores heritage and representations of *nostos*. Being Canadian-born and raised does not mean that the connection to one's heritage is any less strong. As Darlene Madott writes of the

Giovanninis, whose connection to Italy goes back five generations: "They were Italian. Italy could not be extinguished through integration or settlement. Blood has its own memories." For my generation of writers, the in-between generation, the question of *nostos* is very important because we either left Italy ourselves, or we were keen observers of the homesickness that our parents endured. Although leaving home is still difficult today, returning is easier and staying in touch with loved ones is simplified by modern technology. As Madott writes, "we ease our heavy hearts, for we will return, must return, of necessity. A flight of hours now separates Canada from Italy. Nothing as those separations, a century ago. We will come again..." (Accenti 2019). Madott speaks as a grandchild of immigrants, and someone who believes that, to quote Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli, "We want our Canadian children to appreciate our heritage, their heritage" (*People, Places, Passages*, 153). As a literary community, we may also want emerging writers to appreciate their heritage through their creative works. It will be interesting to watch the progression and literary production of our younger literary voices.

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