

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**D'Alfonso, Antonio.** *The Italian Canadian Writer*. Victoria, BC: Ekstasis Editions Canada Ltd., 2023. Pp. 154. ISBN 978-1-77171.534-8 (paperback) \$24.95.

In his latest book, *The Italian Canadian Writer*, Antonio D'Alfonso, filmmaker, writer, editor, translator, and publisher, attempts the formidable task of answering the question, "What is an Italian Canadian writer?" This discourse that is "more cultural than literary, more sociological than artistic" (8) had its origins as an essay commissioned by Anthony Julian Tamburri and Silvana Mangione for the book entitled *La diaspora italiana in Canada* (John D. Calandra Italian-American Institute, 2022).

D'Alfonso begins his answer with four simple definitions, but the reader is soon ensnared in a historical and encyclopedic narrative that has as many questions as answers. He describes and editorializes on an Italian Canadian literary journey that might very well have started with Liborio Lattoni (1874–1958), the first Italian-language poet in Canada (42). In a refreshing, indiscriminate, and egalitarian fashion, leaning on his thirty years of publishing through Guernica Editions, which he founded in 1978, and relying on his vast knowledge of the Canadian literary community, D'Alfonso quotes and cites a plethora of poets, fiction writers, journalists, essayists, academics, and critics to help him narrate this complex and unique literary movement. The sheer number of quotes and snippets overwhelms but enriches the narrative. He writes about a movement whose "obstinate voice of otherness flies out one city and into another, from one house to another, and [whose] utterance won't be silenced" (27). He addresses the birth of this movement that for over fifty years defined the voices of the post-Second World War Italian immigrants and that of the children of those immigrants. The voices of the men and women who chose English Canada and Quebec as their new home, and who wrote about it in Italian, in French, and in English, were "[l]iving abroad" and "welding a new semantic construction of identity" (31).

Throughout *The Italian Canadian Writer*, D'Alfonso touches on a variety of pertinent topics as well as the significant milestones of this time period and the people who participated in accomplishing them: the publishing of *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian*

*Poets*, edited by Pier Giorgio Di Cicco (Dundurn Press, 1978); the Roman conference of 1984; the creation of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers (AICW) in 1986; the squabbling within this writing community; the lack of critical reviews; and the place of Guernica Editions and other publishers. He explains, "The idea [with Guernica] was to establish a literary centre in Canada, a virtual literary salon" (63). He discusses the Italian presence within the social, linguistic, and literary divide in English Canada and Quebec. He points out, "The writer renowned in one location is less so in another" (88). He argues that there is a need for an Italic federation to take in the Canadian Italian writer who is "[a]n outsider, an outcast in Italy, an alien in Canada, with a language never his" (126). He embeds into the discourse the role of anthologies, that of translations, of treacherous ISBN numbers, and the role of the church and politics in Quebec and Ontario.

One can agree or disagree with D'Alfonso's interpretations, musings, and commentary, but one is always engaged. He makes interesting observation, "Language, which should be a means of communication, is transformed into a prison" (39).

There is no denying the historical importance of having created a much needed account of a complicated literary movement that occurred in a time and place perhaps never to be repeated again, a movement mostly ignored by the dominant literary community in English Canada, and in Quebec.

And yet, of equal importance is the pleasure one takes in reading the many excerpts of what the writers who were part of this literary movement thought and wrote. In their voices, taken from their published works, one can hear the trauma, the passion, the angst, the beauty, the artistry, the stories, and the poetry. In this fashion, D'Alfonso introduces and welcomes us into a multifaceted literary family of Italian Canadian authors who may or may not have been known to the reader. Seen in this historical and social context, D'Alfonso breathes new life into their works and with their words he enhances this long essay.

Does he answer the question, "What is an Italian Canadian writer?" He does, but maybe not as one would expect. He mostly answers it by capturing, in this slim volume, the slippery essence of what it is to be an Italian Canadian writer writing in a specific time period.

I highly recommend this book to all Italian Canadian writers, to the Italian community at large, and to all students of Canadian literature. As D'Alfonso says, "The survival of any literary activity depends on the curiosity

of the next generation” (139). If there is to be a next Italian Canadian literary generation, for them, this book is unequivocally essential reading.

JOHN CALABRÒ  
*Toronto, Ontario*

# Italian Canadiana

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SPECIAL ISSUE

**Domestic Goods:  
Silence Speaks  
in Our Objects,  
Clothing, Keepsakes,  
and Interiors**

# Italian Canadiana

*Italian Canadiana* is the peer-reviewed journal of the Frank Iacobucci Centre for Italian Canadian Studies (University of Toronto). It publishes scholarly research articles and reviews in English, French, and Italian devoted to research on all aspects of the lives, history, art, and literature of Italians and their descendants in Canada and the rest of North America (Mexico, the USA) both in recent as well as in earlier periods.

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# Italian Canadiana

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Special issue

*Domestic Goods:*

*Silence Speaks in Our Objects, Clothing, Keepsakes, and Interiors*

Guest Edited by Roberta Iannacito-Provenzano and Lorella Di Cintio

## Contents

### Articles

#### Introduction

*Roberta Iannacito-Provenzano and Lorella Di Cintio* 5

#### Italian-Canadian Family Items as Domestic Objects of a Diaspora

*Gabriel Niccoli* 13

#### “Mania affettiva” e “Verità dei sentimenti” in *The bauletto of Uncle Vittorio* (1958) di Antonio Barolini

*Andrea Sartori* 29

#### Smuggling Plants: Memory and Accountability in the Experience of a Latest-Generation Italian Canadian

*Roberta Buiani* 51

#### The Odyssey of Internment Objects: Material Culture and Unarticulated Family Trauma

*Angela Clarke with Marguerite Ghislieri* 65

#### Institutional Shutter: Depardon and the Basaglias

*Maia Nichols* 89

#### Reading My Father’s *Leggio*: An Autotopography of Mourning in Translation

*Elena Basile* 109

**Book Reviews**

D'Alfonso, Antonio. *The Italian Canadian Writer*. Victoria, BC: Ekstasis Editions Canada Ltd, 2023.  
*John Calabrò* 119

Falsaperla, Silvia. *The Garden of Kolymbethra and Other Poems and Stories about Sicily*. Mineola, NY: Legas, 2024.  
*Damiano Pietropaolo* 122

Pugliese, Olga Zorzi. *My Italian Canadian Family and How its Ancestry Was Traced*. Welland, ON: Soleil Publishing, 2023.  
*Anne Urbancic* 126

Sanfilippo, Matteo. *Il lungo Ottocento delle migrazioni italiane*. Biblioteca, 59. Viterbo: Edizioni Sette Città, 2023.  
*Roberto Perin* 129

Valle, Gina, ed. *Echoes of Growing Up Italian. Women's Stories from Across North America*. Gananoque (ON): Guernica, 2024.  
*Rosaria Moretti-Lawrie* 132

**Books Received** 135

**Contributors** 137