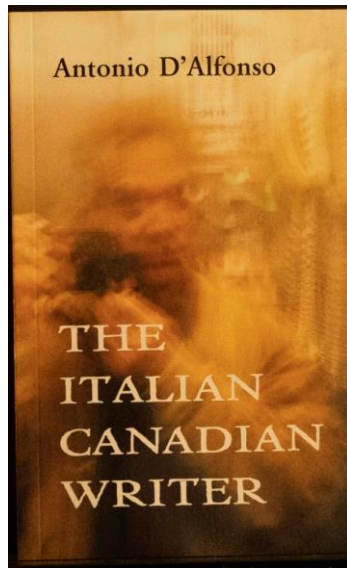


“What is an Italian Canadian writer?”

An encyclopedic narrative.



*The Italian Canadian Writer*, by Antonio D'Alfonso, published by Ekstasis in 2023, attempts the formidable task of answering that question. This 150 pages encyclopedic narrative that is ‘more cultural than literary, more sociological than artistic’ had its origins as an essay commissioned by Anthony Tamburri and Silvana Mangione for the book entitled, *La diaspora italiana in Canada*.

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. In a refreshing, indiscriminate and egalitarian fashion, leaning on his thirty years of publishing through Guernica Editions, which he started 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 obstinate voice of otherness flies out one city and into another, from one house to another, and [whose] utterance won't be silenced.’ He addresses the birth of this movement that for over fifty years defined the voice of the post-WWII Italian immigrant and that of the children of those immigrants. The voice 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, ‘Living abroad they were welding a new semantic construction of identity.’

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 them: the publishing of *Roman Candles* in 1978, the Roman conference of 1984, the creation of the AICW in 1986, the squabbling within this writing community, the lack of critical reviews, and Guernica Editions. "The idea [with *Guernica*] was to establish a literary centre in Canada, a virtual literary salon." He discusses the Italian presence within the social, linguistic and literary divide in English Canada and Quebec. "The writer renowned in one location is less so in another." He argues that there is a need for an Italic federation to take in the Canadian Italian writer who is "...An outsider, an outcast in Italy, an alien in Canada, with a language never his..." He embeds into the discourse the role of anthologies, that of translations, of 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 always engaging, he opens new doors, 'Language, which should be a means of communication, is transformed into a prison.' However, there is no denying the importance of having created a much needed account of a complicated literary movement that occurred in a time and place perhaps never to be duplicated again, a movement mostly ignored by the dominant literary community in English Canada, and in Quebec.

And yet, of equal importance, it is a great a pleasure to read the many snippets of what the writers who were part of this literary movement thought and wrote. In their voices, taken from their published works, you hear the trauma, the passion, the angst, the beauty, the artistry, the stories, and the poetry. D'Alfonso introduces and welcomes the reader into a multifaceted literary family of Italian Canadian writers.

I highly recommend this book to all Italian Canadian writers, to the Italian community at large, and to all students of Canadian literature.

D'Alfonso states that, "The survival of any literary activity depends on the curiosity of the next generation." If there is to be a next generation, for them, this book is unequivocally essential reading.