

## SO POCO A POCO ANIMANDO

TO BE A TOURIST, a visitor, and a guest, who does not speak the host's language, creates a curiously contradictory ferment: in the midst of leaden exasperation a word or two learned brings absurd exhilaration as if you've learned an entire new language, or seen a new world. To begin without a word of Italian, is necessarily to begin in cliché. (Fortunately, in the world of Umberto Eco, the potential of cliché has found new respectability.) Italian is the language of music. And it is a musical language; when every vowel is pronounced the language seems unimpeded and rich in cavities of resonance. *Vivace*. In these clichés you remember the Italian you didn't know you knew: maestro, solo, opera, Sinatra, soprano, Quilico, bravo. Irving Layton, virtuoso, has published at least four books of poems in the language of music. What stronger affirmation of a cliché? English-speaking Canada's most musical, most passionate poet becomes Italian.

*Staccato*. Howard O'Hagan lived in Italy for a decade (in silence?). Italian is the language anglophone and francophone Canada have in common. Which one is the regional country struggling for unification? Adele Wiseman became a Canadian writer in Rome. I wish someone would write a study of the uses of opera in Canadian literature. *Staccato* is the method of playing a note so that it is shortened — and thus “detached” from its successor — by being held for less than its full value. The graphically stunning magazine, *Vice-Versa*, from Montreal, in the two official languages, and *Italian*, orchestrates “literature, social criticism, and the arts” — *con brio*. In 1978 *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets* was published; in 1979 *Voci Nostre: An Italo-Australian Anthology* appeared. The *Christian Guardian* (founding editor, Eger-ton Ryerson) hailed Garibaldi in 1859 as the ultimate Protestant hero: “The great leader never drinks wine, and never eats more than two sorts of meat at dinner. At eight o'clock in the evening he goes to bed, and regularly gets up at two o'clock in the morning.” According to a Gzowski interview on July 1, Italian fireworks must make a loud noise; the specialty in Canadian fireworks is the white light of magnesium, especially suitable for “willows.” *Burning Water* finds

George Vancouver in the streets and trattoria of Trieste (which is Joyce's Italian home), an apparent accident which Eva-Marie Kröller has convinced me is essential to the understanding of the novel. Seven contingents of Zouaves went from Quebec to Rome in 1868 to assist Pope Pius X against Garibaldi; they never got to fight. Staccato playing produces *silence* through most of the written time value of each note.

*Non Tanto.* In the silence I hear the question of the Canadian Studies boondoggle. Not too much, they say; don't overdo it. J. L. Granatstein and Douglas McCalla asked in the now famous editorial in the *Canadian Historical Review* (March 1984) if Canadian Studies are "too much of a Good Thing?" Their argument, oddly, seems ahistorical. Certainly many academic disciplines, at least in the humanities and social sciences, found their beginnings in thematic generalizations, in lists and catalogues, and tentative maps of the territory. Such a pattern is obvious in the recent development of women's studies, in the study of the Canadian literatures, and, of course, earlier in the century, in the development of English as an academic discipline. Following false leads, mechanically summarizing, testing generalizations that will come to seem trivial and inconsequential, are essential to the development of an area of scholarship — and sometimes it will be necessary to retrace the same steps, in some other linguistic and cultural contexts, to prepare for more serious approaches, more profound analysis, and, in the case of literary studies, for more detailed examination of specific texts. Moreover, the impetus to interdisciplinary approaches under the umbrella of Canadian Studies has virtue well beyond the fleeting modishness in the 1960's — challenging arbitrary disciplinary restriction is essential to the growth and sophistication of any individual discipline within Canada. The international dimension of Canadian studies extends our minds: an Australian, or a Danish, or a Japanese scholar will inevitably examine a Canadian subject in new comparative contexts. Their influence can only be beneficial, especially for literary study, which has frequently been too insular. In turn, Canadians preparing to present Canadian subjects in international forums are impelled to search for those illuminatingly varied international contexts. Which returns me to the exasperating ferment of languages. To talk to Quebec in an international forum is easier: other communities, and languages provide a bridge for our internal solitude. And the examination of some Canadian topic against the backdrop of dialects in France, of Italian subtexts, or of German painting enlivens our own discipline. If we listen to more languages we might hear the *legato*, the languages we unconsciously hide within our own language.

*Allegro.* I couldn't get used to Rome the first time. It was too cold, too wet, too grey, too closed up, too February. Too many statues, I thought, and too few department stores. Next time, Eric Levy told me, go first to the Tiber: stand on

one of the bridges, and stare into the swirling, turning brown water. Rome's streets, and traffic (maybe even its words, ending in circles of o's), are built on the patterns of that river. The city moves *allegro*. Livelier. On my second trip I found the rivers — brightening.

*Ponticello*. A little bridge, and then another. Bridges between countries, between languages. More sculpture in the streets, more music in the minds, more soccer, more fireworks. *So poco a poco animando*. In Canada we hear more languages. Little by little things are becoming livelier.

L.R.

## ACCENTI/ACCENTS

*Joseph Maviglia*

We weren't orphans then. Pietro, Vittoria,  
Giuseppe, Franca, Caterina.  
Mixing hockey with skip-rope, there was always  
a place to eat.

The home changed only by our moving. The white-stucco,  
tucked beneath the evergreen neighbourhood, remains;  
Domenico and Francesca waiting by the window.

What changed us? No hide-and-seek could match the distance,  
though we linger with inherited accents,  
tongues dumb to the world ahead.

Domenico and Francesca come to the door.  
Wise, they seem to know we're always there,  
or they are fools to innocent days.

What changed us was a universe, a country  
where we reached to invite strangers in,  
a way to protect the orphans we've become.

What changed them was our leaving, their waiting:  
the love that opens doors,  
the hungering of tongues before the door is open,  
the world outside mumbling to the one within.