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Translation as Re-Narration in Italian-Canadian Writing



Part of the recent story of Canadian literature has been the new prominence of a writing which would have once been labelled or dismissed as ethnic writing. Italian-Canadian writing is a body of literature produced in the last thirty years by writers of Italian background living in Canada. The peculiarity of this prose lies in its multilingualism: it is written in three languages, English, French and Italian and sometimes in a mixture of all three, therefore challenging readers' expectations and resisting easy reading. Moreover, it often uses the first person narrative form to explore the problem of identity formation in the complex cultural topography of Canada.

In such a topography, Italian-Canadian writing is the product of a post-immigrant condition in which the majority of both migrant and non-migrant writers live, and it represents a site of resistance to an official culture of assimilation. Italian Canadian writers in fact, having to confront constantly their personal self image with their public, often stereotypical image of Italian-Canadians seem to be mainly concerned with finding a way to reconcile opposing instances coming from different cultural traditions. This fight, often articulated through the impossibility of finding a proper language of expression, can be interpreted as a translation process. Narrating for these Italian-Canadian writers is equivalent to translating, and so rewriting their identity.

However, instead of the word 'rewriting' I prefer to use the idea of narration, more precisely the term 're-narration'. The idea of narrative as understood by social sciences nowadays sees identity as something constructed in the process of narrating. By presenting fragments instead of fully developed characters and a single narrative thread, the stories of Italian-Canadian writers stress the need to analyze identity as a problematic narrative construction. My research therefore explores the way in which personal and public identities are negotiated and built in a trilogy of novels by a writer of Italian background living in Canada, Nino Ricci. Moreover, it investigates how this negotiation is conveyed in the translation of these novels into Italian in order to understand how Nino Ricci is reframed for an Italian audience and what kind of narrative sustains this reframing.

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