

In June 1999, I completed the Master of Arts degree in Italian Studies (Dean's Honour List) at McGill University and I am applying for admission to the PhD program in Humanities at Concordia University for September 2000.

The MA thesis, entitled, "Una raccolta di lettere italiane inviate agli emigrati in Canada, 1954-1955" (A Collection of Italian Letters Sent to Emigrants Living in Canada, 1954-1955) is a unique interdisciplinary study which examines a series of Italian letters written by "ordinary" people from the Northeastern regions in Italy, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto. The nineteen private letters, included in their entirety in the thesis, were sent to individual family members who had migrated to Canada to improve their economic conditions. The study combines the disciplines of History and Linguistics. It examines the role of "popular" letters with respect to past studies (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927, Franzina 1979, Baily and Ramella 1988). It explores the socioeconomic landscape of postwar Italy where the revision of the Italy/Yugoslavia border, 1947-1954, and the economic hardships of recovery were key factors in promoting emigration (Ginsborg 1990, Quadrelli 1990). Finally, it analyses the language of the letters, that is "l'italiano popolare" (popular Italian) and the sociocultural elements which contributed to the birth of the language's multiple definitions (De Mauro 1970, 1974, Cortelazzo 1976, Vanelli 1976, Berruto 1987, 1993). The detailed linguistic analysis presented in the thesis exemplifies the particular spelling, morphology, syntax and structure of the language while underscoring the principle that grammatical errors should not be considered "errors" per se, but linguistic solutions to problems caused by hypercorrection, linguistic interference and simplification particular to a bilingual environment. The letter-writers

normally spoke in dialect (Friulian and Venetian) to family members and friends, and only used Standard Italian occasionally. As a result, the letters reveal a strong presence of regionalisms and dialect borrowings (Vanelli 1976, De Mauro and Lodi 1979, Berruto 1987).

Through my studies in the PhD in Humanities, I will explore further the linguistic dimension of these types of letters by providing a diachronic analysis of the language adopted in the letters written by four Italian families. These letter-writers were industrial and agrarian workers, housekeepers and nurses who resided in Spilimbergo, Trieste, Vicenza and Venice. Their letters provide a firsthand understanding of the Italian language as written by ordinary people from the Italian Northeastern regions in recent decades (De Mauro 1970, Francescato 1970, 1977, Cortelazzo 1979, Marcato 1979, Berruto 1987, 1993).

Building on my MA thesis, the research for the interdisciplinary PhD in Humanities aims to weave together three disciplines: History, Anthropology, and Linguistics. Fifty letters spanning 1950 to 1970 will be used as primary sources, in addition to oral interviews with the letters' addressees. The major fields of concentration are Contemporary Italian History and Contemporary Canadian History. The minor fields are Gender and Kinship within the discipline of Anthropology and Diachronic Linguistics within the discipline of Linguistics.

The proposed doctoral study, entitled, "Letters from Home: An Exploration of Postwar Society and Language in Italy and Canada, 1950-1970" will provide a unique account of working-class and agrarian populations in Italy and Canada. It will offer a portrait of social and gender relations in the four families and an understanding of the

letter-writers' ability to use the national language in a bilingual climate where dialect is prevalent. The letters that are the primary sources constitute subjective and never previously examined life-writing accounts (Kadar 1992). The use of well-defined bodies of text and the deconstruction of these texts will allow me to ask different sets of questions and explore more fully the voices of postwar Italy and Canada, the subjective experience of the people who wrote these letters, and the period in which the letters were written.

From an historical point of view, I will explore the social, economic and political circumstances surrounding the working and agrarian classes in Postwar Italy, in particular the Northeastern regions (Valussi 1961, Evans 1976). Because most letters paraphrase the addressees' lives in Canada as immigrants, the sociohistorical, economic and political landscape in Canada between 1950 and 1970 will also be examined. The main focus will be the process of adaptation and settlement of newly-arrived Italian emigrants from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions and their reception in Montreal, Toronto and the Okanagan Valley. (Boissevain 1970, Ramirez 1984, 1989, Iacovetta 1993, 1998, Harney 1985, Jansen 1985, Peressini 1989). These ordinary families' letters concentrate not only on a smaller history of family and community, but also on local economic conditions and political realities. For this reason, I will examine the historical meaning of the letters from multiple perspectives, including the gender, age, class and occupation of their authors. As well, the thesis will analyse the internal history of the letters and reevaluate them as evolving historical documents. Specific to emigration correspondence, the role of private letters in promoting emigration in Italy for Canada

will be examined (Franzina 1979, Baily and Ramella 1988). To develop the linkage between the letters and their addressees through oral history, this part of the thesis will include interviews with surviving correspondents (Reimer et al. 1984, Thompson and Perks 1990, Portelli 1991).

From an anthropological perspective, the letters reveal gender and kinship relations in individual families experiencing the realities of transnationalism (Di Leonardo 1984, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Glick Schiller et al. 1995). In addition, they invite examination of the emotional attachment expressed by the correspondents in Italy and Canada. The importance of maintaining family ties will be explored together with the social and economic relations - - familial values, gender and kinship relations - - that emerged and evolved over the two decades (Boissevain 1976, Peressini 1989, Di Leonardo 1984, Ilcan and Phillips 1998). In one set of letters from a mother to her emigrant son, for example, it is possible simultaneously to follow changes in his occupational status, and trace modulations in her concern for his welfare as he takes on jobs that involve varying degrees of physical hardship.

As linguistic texts, the letters demonstrate the internal use of language, its relationship with a dialectal environment and the modifications (syntax, morphology and spelling) that may have occurred over time. The study of the language's evolution reveals similarities and differences in style and themes that emerge between individual authors (men and women of different age groups and occupations). For instance, in one set of letters, the thematic difference between the father's and the mother's writings is revealed in the father's tendency to write about

economic and job-related matters, while the mother asks God to keep her son well and sends him best wishes from various family members and friends.

I believe the research project I am proposing will provide an invaluable opportunity to develop further interdisciplinary studies as the use of vernacular texts speaks to larger issues in historical, cultural and linguistic studies. Historians, immigration historians, as well as scholars from other disciplines have tended to use such letters in legitimate, but relatively limited ways (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927, Baily and Ramella 1988). One of the major differences between my proposed project and historical studies is that these letters are written by people who remained in their homeland. The other major difference is my approach, which is more holistic than that taken by linguists, anthropologists and historians. I wish to study these texts whole, that is, to see how the language and the form of the letters are related to their content and context, and how the letter-writers' desire and ability to express and assign meaning to the realities they experienced is filtered through their prose.

Personal narratives have long stimulated scholarly interest, both as sources of evidence and as texts in their own right. As documents, the letters are embedded in particular moments of historical time and place, and speak directly to the issues of postwar economic dislocation in Italy (Ginsborg 1990) and adaptation to North American society (Jansen 1985, Peressini 1989, Iacovetta 1993).

For the proposed doctoral studies to be held at Concordia University, Prof. Graham Carr (Dept. of History) will be the major field advisor and Prof. Sally Cole (Dept. of Anthropology) will be one of the minor field advisors. In addition, Prof. Bruno Ramirez (Dept. of History, Université de Montréal) and Prof. Jana

Vizmuller-Zocco (Dept. of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, York University) will be participating as external advisors to the program. I will be taking the following courses/tutorials that are directly relevant to my thesis and designed to round out my disciplinary formation and address issues of theory and method in detail: "Postwar Italian History" (B. Ramirez); "Postwar Canadian History" (G. Carr); "Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Anthropological Theory" (S. Cole); "Writing Methods in Inter-Cultural Communication" (M.N. LeBlanc); and "Theory of Diachronic Linguistics and Language Contact in Italy" (J. Vizmuller-Zocco).

The pursuit of this program at Concordia University is facilitated by the fact that Montreal possesses a strong Italian community thus enabling access to additional letters as well as oral interviews with Italian-born Canadians. It also provides an ideal academic setting as it hosts several active scholars, in addition to my advisors, involved in related aspects of the research, namely, Norman Ingram, Filippo Salvatore, Bruno Villata and John Zucchi. Moreover, the city's proximity to Toronto allows me to consult with other scholars, such as Gianrenzo Clivio, Marcel Danesi, Dirk Hoerder, Franca Iacovetta, Marlene Kadar, Roberto Perin, Gabriel Scardellato and Franc Sturino.

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