

migration to Toronto secured for thousands of Southern Italians. Likewise, in our analyses of the resiliency of immigrant families in withstanding new world pressures and in carving out their own lives, we ought not to forget that this was sometimes achieved at great emotional cost, and that women in particular suffered emotional and psychological scars engendered by the difficult early years.

¹ Vincenza Scarpaci, "The Plaything of the Middle-Class Woman Historian," *Occasional Papers on Ethnic and Immigration Studies* (Toronto: MHSO, 1972.)

² For further statistical details see, for example, Franca Iacovetta, "From Cortadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-62," in *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History*, ed. Jean Burnet (Toronto: MHSO, 1986).

³ On women in Southern Italy see, for example, Jan Brogger Montavarese, *A Study of Present Society and Culture in Southern Italy* (Oslo, 1971) Constance Cronin, *The Sting of Change: Sicilians in Sicily and Australia* (Chicago, 1971); Ann Cornelison, *Women of the Shadows: A Study of the Wives and Mothers of Southern Italy* (New York, 1970).

⁴ *Corriere Canadese; Teledominica.*

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all of the case histories have been culled from the confidential files of the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto, PAO.

⁶ Social Planning Council Records, City of Toronto Archives. A. Cecilia Pope, R.N., to Doris Clark (15 April 1958).

⁷ *Corriere Canadese; Toronto Telegram; Toronto Star; Toronto Globe and Mail* (October 1955 issues).

⁸ Interviews (confidential, names withheld).

Ave

The intelligence of hands
without books,
made thin by famine, war,
sleeping in the hay of concentration
camps,
eating hay,
the Germans raging
as the Americans ran up Italia's calf,
your father planted his body like seeds,
parts here and there on Antonella's roof
found a week after the funeral
that buried the soul of a man in a single
thigh
for the last day's rising,

Hands made plump by pasta
and the keep appetite of Canadian
winter,

working hands,
made coarse by detergents,
calloused with the friction
of assembling the wiry parts of small
appliances, the fiction
of prosperity, the car, the bungalow, the
daughter

with a university education,
the dream packaged in the potato
factory, frozen,
the chocolate factory, stale, the
home scrubbed to shining, mortgaged,
dressed in marigolds and pink asters,

the intelligence of hands,
the sharpeyed needle darning the drapes
that robe a pink future on the western
horizon,

the desire for grandchildren, a prayer,
smoking in the flames of votary
candles,
snuffed before an indifferent madonna,
a hope like the geraniums potted in the
window

which refuse to flower,
offering only brown buds to the light,

the intelligence of hands
and arms to the elbow in the blood
harvest of California grapes,
new wine in the new world,

All the shrewdness of a lioness
weaning her young
yet
pampering the self-satisfied rex,
mamma,
the reputed intelligence of your sex,
lies in the blood's eclipse of the mind,
thirty lunar months,
three other selves,
shoots of vines
for hybrid grapes.

A Strange Grace

For my father's mother

Love always dressed herself in black.
She was a fat old woman with dark
eyes.

Love always loved me best,
her golden grandchild,
the one who tried to explain herself
right into her heart
for a little chocolate cheese
gilded in foil.

She was an octogenarian, love, a
matriarch,
and her heart tracked for many miles
barefoot in its slow orbit in the space
of the chest.

Love knew the ivory limit
of her universe
and the miracle of a child's
sunrise birth, unfolding
with the first explosion of light
on the horizon, a cry ripped
out of the nurturing darkness,
a free fall with a strange grace toward
another
kind of darkness,

and the precocious day chattering and
chattering,
as if she couldn't shut up for a second,
as if she couldn't shut up for good,
as if the world could just keep busy on
the tip
of her tongue.

Love always dressed herself in black.
Posing with her seated on a white marble
bench
by the Roman gardens, as I stood on the
stone slab
our heads were level, the silver and the
gold.

My crescent arm around her neck
embracing a premature passion
deeper than forests of brazilian cocoa.

My truest, my dearest love, in the
whole of time,
in the intimacy of my innocence,
the love I left for a new world,
far away from her old country seat,

sealed in marble and invisible
love, who always loved me best.

Mary di Michele

...from *Bread and Chocolate*
(Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1980).