La scrittura è personale e matura, la sintassi snella e agile, la lingua ben controllata, come scrive Maurizio Dardano (Stili provvisori. La lingua nella narrativa italiana d’oggi, Roma, Carocci, 2010, p. 99). Inoltre la narrazione tende spesso a spiccare il volo con uno stile complesso, specchio della psicologia dei protagonisti, ma Giordano è capace sempre di riacciuffarlo prima che sia troppo tardi. Mattia Balossino, uno dei due veri protagonisti, è un po’ troppo simile all’autore, quanto meno per l’interesse, meglio per la ragione di vita, comune: lo sconfinato mondo dei numeri.

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The exploration of Canadian identity has been a staple of public discourse in Canada, but interest in the topic also extends to a number of European academic institutions, including the Centre for Canadian Culture at the University of Udine, Italy. The current volume celebrates the Centre’s tenth anniversary with the work of scholars and writers who were invited to present papers during the academic year 2008-2009. The result is an eclectic assortment, ranging from Toronto Star journalism to the technical aspects of poetry translation, all directed toward “creation of a distinct Canadian transcultural and transnational identity” (14). With so general a focus, the work does not pretend to be a cohesive anthology. The observant reader will glean thematic insight by noting the connections between articles in which the same underlying concerns emerge. These include, most notably, exploitation of the alien “other” (immigrant Canadians or aboriginals), whether in literary production, academic research or political discourse. Many contributors also address postmodern aesthetics in term of literary borrowings and genre mixing, all of which touch on our perceptions of the truth.

The opening article by Joseph Pivato (professor of Literary Studies and English at Athabasca University in Edmonton, Alberta) may be read as a sort of keynote for the concerns of minority Canadians, one which echoes throughout many of these papers. He takes on the fraught issue of literary theory in the academy as it intersects (and sometimes collides) with the hopes and aspirations of Canadian minority writers (“Ethnic Minority Writers and the Resistance to Theory: The Italian-Canadian Case”). Worth noting is the quandary of newcomers who struggle for their own emerging voices when faced with academic theorizing about the death of the author. Equally problematic are various “literary salvage operations” (24) performed on the texts themselves. In Pivato’s view, the notion of intertextuality—that literary texts are in fact products of other literary texts—too often excludes the ethnic writer whose work may reference a newcomer’s life experience rather than the texts of a newly-acquired language. Likewise, the use of minority writers’ work—often preoccupied with the subject of miscommu-
nication—as source material for linguistic theory raises fears of misinterpretation (and further misunderstanding). It also reveals, in this reader’s view, a “value-added” approach to literature as a form of mining, in which the creative ore of literary writing gains worth through its refining and processing into a high-end, academic product. Pivato concludes this valuable contribution on a cautionary note for ethnic writers by concluding that “in the end, all we have is our stories.” (28).

Yet stories (including true ones) have become malleable in light of postmodern aesthetics, and several contributors address this concern. Of interest are two articles on fictive elements in the writing of memoir. Nduka Otiono discusses a biography of Grey Owl by Armand Garnet Ruffo, an aboriginal descendant of the family that adopted the would-be native Archie Belaney, contrasting white and First Nations views of his self-reinvention as an aboriginal. Likewise, Caterina Edwards reflects on writing a memoir of her mother, one which includes a fictional reconstruction of her life. She emphasizes exactitude of language and form—the clarity and precision from which narrative truth arises.

Questions of intertextuality arise in Deborah Saidero’s interview with the Canadian writer Janice Kulyk Keefer; among a variety of subjects, the author discusses her use of texts and characters drawn from the work of Katherine Mansfield in her novel Thieves, along with her re-envisioning of T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land as a contemporary statement on environmental degradation. Kulyk Keefer reflects on the hazards of this mix-and-match aesthetic (both in its borrowings and in its use of speculation about the lives of living authors, most notably in her biography of Mavis Gallant). In doing so, she notes what might be a controversial view: those gaps in the historical record allow for speculative renderings of a subject’s life. Three of the eleven contributions to this volume concern Kulyk Keefer’s work, beginning with a selection of her poetry in which she reflects on her Ukrainian identity in precise and often striking images. It is puzzling, however, that Saidero’s interview did not precede the poems, so that readers unfamiliar with the author might have an introduction to her work.

Other contributions of interest include a consideration of Margaret Atwood’s position as social critic and technological innovator, opera’s treatment of the “exotic other” and its intersection with jazz through the work of poet George Elliot Clarke, and a consideration of the work of the Italian-Canadian painter Albert Chiarandini with its vivid portraiture and social comment. Michael Keefer’s cautionary tale of Canadian smugness—both offering aid to Haiti and supporting the 2004 invasion and coup that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide—offers a necessary counterweight to the country’s benign self-image. Yet it feels out of place in this assemblage of literary/artistic contributions. As politically engaged writing, it needs and deserves a larger audience than the academy.

Such a collection can only begin to suggest—or to represent—the vitality and energy of Canada’s multicultural life. Yet by opening the door a crack, individual authors provoke thought and let in some of the light.

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