



Association of Italian Canadian Writers

Executive

President Maria Cristina Seccia

Vice-President Delia De Santis

Secretary Giulia Verticchio

Treasurer Cristina Pepe

Editorial Board

Josephine Atri

Domenic Beneventi

Anna Ciampolini Foschi

Carmelo Militano

Christina Sforza

Newsletter Committee

Josephine Atri

Domenic Beneventi

Anna Ciampolini Foschi

Francesca Foschi Mitchell (editor)

Christina Sforza

Dear Members,

This winter has seen many literary events and we are looking forward to a Spring and Summer full of book launches and other occasions to celebrate our members' achievements.

We are currently in the process of discussing the 2020 AICW Conference, and we will share information on our web site and social media as soon as they are finalized.

Please do let us know about your events and publications and send us the details whenever there is a Call from the Newsletter Committee.

Welcome to our new members and thank you to those who have renewed their memberships. If you have not done so yet, you can visit our membership page (<http://www.aicw.ca/become-a-member>) or you can fill out the form at the end of this newsletter.

Thank you for your continued support of our Association!

Best wishes,

Dr. Maria Cristina Seccia
AICW President

AICW on Facebook and Twitter

Follow the AICW on Twitter [@AICWCanada](https://twitter.com/AICWCanada)

If you are on [Facebook](#), please take the time to LIKE our page and to post information about your new publications and events



Gianna's Words in Bronze

By Gianna Patriarca

On August 25th, 2018 poet Gianna Patriarca's words were unveiled in bronze on one of Toronto's main streets, Bloor St. West at the corner of Westmoreland. Her poem was commissioned by the BIA (Business Improvement Area) and the City of Toronto to honour a neighbourhood and its history and in particular the Paradise Theater where many Italian/Canadian immigrants in the 60's and 70's were able to watch Italian films. The theater which is now under restoration will have a new life in the year 2019 and will return to its Art/Deco glory for a new generation to enjoy, along with an added café and restaurant. Gianna's poem is placed directly across from the theater and her words will be there for everyone to enjoy and become part of our continuing history and what Italian-Canadians have contributed to Canada.

We Remain

papa dropped me off
 every Saturday afternoon
 our storefront playhouses
 the Kenwood, the Doric
 the Paradise
 a dollar for the dream
 a quarter for the popcorn
 ordinary lives distracted
 from the routine of
 infinite toil and hustle
 beneath the muted lights
 the magic of romance and escape.
 neighbourhoods resist centuries
 patching cracks
 conceiving new forms to celebrate
 we are
 the theater of our imagination
 we remain

Gianna Patriarca (2015)

In Memory of Anastasia Carmen

Laurenza Ziolkowski

By Delia De Santis



Carmen Ziolkowski.
 Uncredited photo.

It was early in the seventies when I first met Carmen Ziolkowski. I was taking a writing course at our local college when the teacher asked me if I knew her. "I just love her poetry," she said. Though I had never seen Carmen, I knew of her. As a nurse, she was a godsend for the Italian immigrants of our town of Sarnia, Ontario. *La Signora Carmen*, as everyone called her, worked at the children's wing of St. Joseph's Hospital. She was the one desperate Italian mothers with sick children

called for guidance and help. Carmen took many Italians who couldn't speak English to the doctor. She used to go to the homes of young mothers to show them how to prepare baby formula. She responded to all kinds of emergencies, not always about sickness and health. She cared, but she was not one to mince words. She would tell women to stand up for themselves; to try to control their situations, not always be dependent on the men, and instead of wasting time complaining and commiserating they should apply that time to important things, like studying English.

Of course, these immigrants, mostly of peasant background, didn't know what to make of this strong-minded, liberated woman. Some Italian men were even afraid she would corrupt their wives, but most of all, their daughters, for Carmen was always advising young girls to "go to university... travel... don't be afraid to explore the world." To bring some socialising to the married women, especially those who weren't out working, she organized an Italian Catholic Women's League at the church where the bilingual priest celebrated one mass in Italian on Sundays. Carmen often argued with the priest about the interpretation of certain passages in the Bible, but he tolerated her because she was bringing new souls to the church... and the Italian women were good bakers who raised a lot of money with their church bazaars.



NEWS



Uncredited photo.

Carmen was born outside of Naples, to a well to do family. She attended boarding school in Rome until the war came. She would never speak about the events of the war as relating to her family. When she talked about the wonderful days of her youth, she would always end abruptly by saying: "... And then the war came..." and I just knew that whatever had happened to her family, and their wealth was a subject to remain sealed behind the closed door of her memory. But I did know that her mother and father had died from the bombing, and some of her siblings had gone to live in different countries. Carmen herself finished her schooling in England and worked as a midwife there until she got the itch to see other parts of the world. Nurses were needed in Ontario, and she applied to come to Sarnia because she liked the Italian sounding name. Soon she met and married Bruno Ziolkowski, a man who had fought in the war and had been in a concentration camp in Siberia for quite a while.

Carmen's desire to see the world didn't stop with her move to Canada. Though remaining in Sarnia all her life, she travelled to many parts of the world with her two young sons, and later by herself. Her husband never traveled with her; because of his terrible experiences in the concentration camp, he had fears about going outside of Sarnia. Carmen was very frugal, and used to say, "I don't need much in life... food and some money to travel." She always travelled with books to read and pen and paper to journalize her travels.

Later in life, she enrolled in a journalism course and ended up writing many articles, some for a Sarnia business magazine. She wrote prose in English, and in Italian; she could also speak Spanish and French.

Carmen wrote plays in Italian, staging them at Sarnia's Dante Club. Her novel, *The House of Four Winds* was published in England (1987), and she published four poetry books. In the seventies and eighties, she wrote many short stories, and most of them appeared in magazines, while others were read on CBC radio. For many years we both attended a writers' workshop at our local library on Thursday evenings, and she always came with new writing to be critiqued. In later years she was still writing a lot but didn't care much anymore about getting her work organized to be published. Other things became more important to her, such as spending time with her three grandchildren, swimming, and even puttering in her husband's garden when he no longer could take care of the vegetables.

In the last few years, when I visited her, there would be piles of books on her coffee table. Often she would be re-reading 'the great writers' especially the Russians and the English. And she would show me her needlework, the latest petit point picture she was making. She didn't follow a pattern, she did it all free hand. One of her best piece of needlework won a prize at the local art gallery.

Meeting Carmen was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was brought up in a strict immigrant family, and she became my 'life' mentor. She encouraged me to think for myself and to follow my dreams. The first time I attended a conference by the Association of Italian Canadian Writers, it was Carmen who encouraged me to go. She was already a member of the AICW, and she said that meeting other Italian Canadian writers would be good for me. So, to Vancouver, I went with her. There I met Dr. Joseph Pivato and Anna Foschi and other founding members of the association; also, many other Italian Canadian writers from across Canada—some of them became my friends.

Carmen was talented in many ways, but for me what she did best was to write her beautiful poetry, mostly about love and nature. Sometimes I wonder how many poems are still in the drawers of her desk, finished but unpublished—written



Uncredited photo.



by hand on the back of envelopes, hydro bills, scraps of paper, for she hated wasting paper and the idea that we were destroying forests.

My cherished friend and mentor passed away December 26, 2018. In two months, she would have been ninety-six. She was ready to 'go.' Her heart had gotten weaker, and she was tired. Books still surrounded her, but her love of reading could no longer be sustained. She went to her rest with her beautiful head of white hair with a youthful swatch of purple at the front. She will always be remembered by those who knew her for her strong resilience, her distinctive character, and her talents.

Survival

From my frosted window
I see my husband
muffled in his threadbare coat
making his way
down slippery garden path
to the desolate pear tree.

He adorns a branch
with a red net bag—
the tree is alive
with a crowd of hungry birds
furiously pecking.

(Poem taken from *World of Dreams*. © Carmen A. Ziolkowski. River City Press: Sarnia ON, 1995. Permission by the family.)

Memories

At twilight I like to remember my lovers.
The one I like the best is the blond
with a Roman nose.
He was like a stained-glass window,

full of symbols and mysteries
his smile glowing like a huge summer star.
He put quick rhythm in my veins.
The blood would flow riding a full sail
In favourable wind.

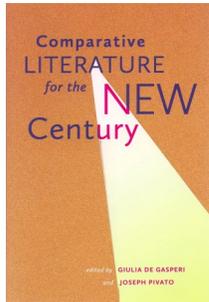
His name could be anything.
I can never be certain.
I was amiss, I didn't keep a list.

(Poem taken from *The Moon Before the Sun*. Premier Poet Tree Series # 5. Ontario Poetry Society) © Carmen Ziolkowski. Permission by the family)



Italian-Canadian Writers and Academics in Vancouver

By Joseph Pivato



The Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) will be held at UBC in Vancouver from June 2-7, 2019. Joseph Pivato has organized a session on **Comparative Canadian Literature: New Directions**. This will be a joint session of the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures and the Canadian Comparative Literature Association. Here is the list of speakers and topics for this June 2nd event:

Session Chair, Joseph Pivato, Athabasca University
Opening Statement on Comparative Canadian Literature

Des mères au miroir: la figure de la mère et son double dans ru, mèn et vi de Kim Thúy.

Speaker: Maria Cristina Greco, Université de Moncton

New Reading Directions: *Nicole Brossard's Aesthetic of Thought.*

Speaker: Anne Quema, Acadia University,

Beirut, Hell and Blood: Murderous Identities in Lebanese-Canadian Literature.

Speaker: May Telmissany, University of Ottawa,

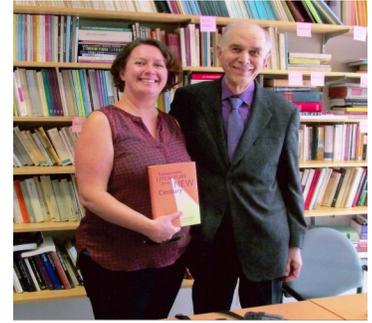
The Autobiographical Impulse and Language Choice in the work of Italian-Canadian Writers.

Speaker: Katharina Logan, University of Toronto.
(Italian Studies)

Everyone is welcomed on June 2nd. Exact time and place will be announced.

Please note: Joseph Pivato explains that the Canadian Association for Italian Studies no longer participates in the annual Congresses of the HSS which means that

members can no longer hold joint session with other associations. And even more regrettable, the CAIS no longer promoting Italian language, literature and culture at these large national congresses which take place in a different Canadian city each year.



Joseph Pivato and Katharina Logan in Toronto. Photo by Juliana Pivato

Michael Mirolla: upcoming events, residencies and publications

If you missed Michael Mirolla's book tour for his magic realist short story collection *The Photographer in Search of Death* (Exile Editions 2017), you can still catch him at the following readings and events across the Golden Horseshoe. Coming up in March:

- March 14th: Book signing at Indigo Spirit at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital, 11 am- 2 pm
- March 17th: Reading at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library with Caitlin Galway, 2 pm.

On March 24th, Michael Mirolla will be leading a one-hour workshop on combining poetry with visual art at the Oakville Art Society. For more information and to sign up, visit: <http://www.oakvilleartsociety.com/workshops.html>

Michael Mirolla's new existentialist novella *The Last News Vendor*, is forthcoming from Quattro Books in Fall 2019. Stay tuned for a schedule of readings and literary events for Fall 2019 and Spring 2020.

The Macedonian translation of his novel *Berlin* is forthcoming from Feniks.

From 1 November 2019 - 31 January 2020, Mirolla will be the Writer-in-Residence at the Historic Joy Kogawa House in Vancouver. News on workshops, readings and other literary events in Vancouver & area, will be posted in Fall 2019.

Keep track of Michael's schedule on www.michaelmirolla.com or follow him on Twitter [@MichaelMirolla1](https://twitter.com/MichaelMirolla1).



Presentazione del volume “Da Milocca a Milena” in traduzione italiana.

di Anna Foschi Ciampolini



Anna Ciampolini Foschi. *Photo by Francesca Foschi Mitchell*

Il 21 dicembre 2018 il Comune di Milena ha organizzato un convegno sul tema: "L'antropologo analizza una comunità speciale", dedicato al volume "Da Milocca a Milena, il ruolo dell'antropologo nella storia comunitaria" a cura di Sam Migliore, Margaret D'Orazio Migliore e Vincenzo C. Ingrasci, uscito nella traduzione italiana di Anna

Foschi Ciampolini e stampato a cura della Società Nissena di Storia Patria Caltanissetta. Il volume è centrato sulla figura di Charlotte Gowier Chapman (1902-1982) etnologa e autrice, fra le altre sue numerose opere, di uno studio antropologico dal titolo: *Milocca: A Sicilian Village*, che comprendeva un resoconto dettagliato della vita quotidiana, delle tradizioni e del misticismo che avevano per generazioni ispirato lo stile di vita dei Siciliani ma che stavano per essere inesorabilmente cambiati dagli avvenimenti fondamentali che stavano accadendo nel XX secolo.

COMUNE DI MILENA ASSESSORATO ALLA CULTURA

PRESENTAZIONE DEL LIBRO

SAM MIGLIORE
MARGARET D'ORAZIO-MIGLIORE
VINCENZO C. INGRASCI

Da Milocca a Milena

Il ruolo dell'antropologo nella storia comunitaria

Traduzione italiana di Anna Foschi Ciampolini

Società Nissena di Storia Patria Caltanissetta

CONVEGNO SUL TEMA

L'ANTROPOLOGO ANALIZZA UNA COMUNITÀ SPECIALE

SALUTI
DOTT. CLAUDIO S. CIPOLLA - SINDACO DEL COMUNE DI MILENA

MODERATORE
PROF. ANTONIO VITELLARO - PRESIDENTE DELLA SOCIETÀ NISSENA DI STORIA PATRIA DI CALTANISSETTA

INTRODUZIONE
TOMMASO PALUMBO - STUDIOSO DI STORIA LOCALE

INTERVENTI
DOTT. GIOVANBATTISTA TONA - CONSIGLIERE CORTE D'APPELLO DI CALTANISSETTA
PROF. PAOLINO SCHILLACI - DOTT. GIUSEPPE VITELLARO - DOTT.SSA ILENIA TONA

CONCLUDE
VINCENZO C. INGRASCI - COAUTORE

VENERDÌ 21 DICEMBRE 2018 - ORE 17.00

SALA CONFERENZE "FALCONE-BORSELLINO"
BIBLIOTECA COMUNALE "LEONARDO SCIASCIA"
VIA VERDI - MILENA (CL)

IL SINDACO
DOTT. CLAUDIO S. CIPOLLA

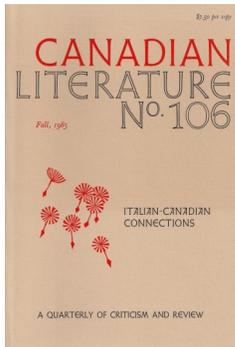
L'ASSESSORE ALLA CULTURA
DOTT.SSA ILENIA TONA



Italian-Canadian Connections

Revisited

By Joseph Pivato



In 1985, Joseph Pivato co-edited with W.H. New an issue of Canadian Literature No. 106, devoted to Italian-Canadian writers. As he documents in his essay, “Twenty Years of Change,” he had to first convince editor, W.H. New to publish an issue on Italian-Canadian authors when he met with him in May, 1983. (See *Strange Peregrinations*, p. 19.) The issue had the thematic title, “Italian-Canadian Connections” and included Dino Minni’s interview with Frank Paci, Fulvio Caccia’s French article. “Les Poètes italo-montréalais,” Kenneth Meadwell’s essay on the French poetry of Alexandre Amprimoz, Sherry Simon’s essay about the theatre of Marco Micone, Robert Kroetsch’s article on the grammar of silence in ethnic writing and Joseph Pivato’s short essay. “The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature.” There were also poems by Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Pasquale Verdicchio, Mary Melfi, Antonio D’Alfonso, Mary di Michele, Len Gasparini, Marco Fraticelli and Dorina Michelutti (Dore Michelut).

This 1985 publication along with Pivato’s *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing and Caccia and D’Alfonso’s Quêtes: Textes d’auteurs italo-québécois* lent some impetus to the founding of the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers in September, 1986, during the conference in Vancouver organized by Dino Minni, Anna Foschi and Genni Gunn.

With all the books produced by Italian-Canadian writers since 1985, Joseph Pivato was asked to write a brief review of the literary contributions of these authors who publish in English, in French, in Italian and some dialects too. The essay “Italian-Canadian Connections at 33,” appeared in *Canadian Literature* No. 236 (2018). One of his arguments is that “the major contribution that Italian-Canadian writers have

made to Canadian letters is with the promotion of ethnic minority writing as an integral part of Canadian Literature.” See the humble cover of the 1985 issue.

La Brigantessa: News & Reviews

By Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli



Photo by Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli

Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli’s novel attracts the attention of the literary world. Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli’s novel *La Brigantessa* has been featured in articles and reviews, along with details about her writing journey and publishing success:

Sudbury Star: [https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/former-sudbury-teacher-finds-](https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/former-sudbury-teacher-finds-writing-success/)

[writing-success/](https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/former-sudbury-teacher-finds-writing-success/)

Women Writers: <http://booksbywomen.org/why-i-write-by-rosanna-michelotta-battigelli/>

Un Pò Di Pepe’s Review: <https://unpodipepe.ca/2019/01/07/la-brigantessa/>

Humber School for Creative Writing & Performing Arts: <https://creativearts.humber.ca/programs/school-writers/news/a-qa-with-rosanna-michelotta-battigelli-a.k.a.-rosanna-battigelli-author-of-la-brigantessa.html>

Domenico Capilongo’s Interview: <http://italocanadese.com/2019/02/04/un-momento-with-rosanna-michelotta-battigelli/?fbclid=IwAR0sfOMkw8uq9w183d1VyXf5-YQFBLOx-NvujHYMvy2I6iCOeW0CX-ZR03Q#.XFnGpfy1vA.facebook>

Barbara Kyle article: <https://mailchi.mp/barbarakyle.com/are-you-ready-to-move-up-from-writer-to-author>

All Lit Up interview: <https://alllitup.ca/Blog/2019/First-Fiction-Friday-La-Brigantessa>

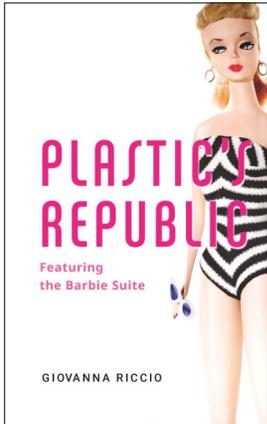


Photo by Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli



BARBIE TURNS 60 AS GUERNICA LAUNCHES PLASTIC'S REPUBLIC

By **Giovanna Riccio**



Barbara Millicent Roberts, AKA Barbie, turns 60 this year. So much more than a mere toy, she defines the stellar player. In *Plastic's Republic*, Giovanna Riccio offers an adventurous poem sequence that delves into this complex cultural icon and feminist bête-noir powered by plasticity. Aside from themes haunted by the ghost of Plato,

the poems give voice to the major players in Barbie's development and mammoth success, including Ruth Handler who co-founded Mattel with her husband; their daughter Barbara—the doll's inspiration and namesake—and *Barbie*, herself. "The Barbie Suite" also features poems about *Barbie* versions that highlight Mattel's opportunistic marketing response to social trends. Verses on the "Human Barbie" phenomenon tackle plastic-obsessed humans who embrace physical and digital plastic surgery to embody 'dollification.' The book's finale naturally segues to silicone sex dolls and a plastic-smothered ocean.

Here's Mary Melfi, award winning novelist, poet and playwright, commenting on the book:

If one expects to read only one book of poems this year, let it be Giovanna Riccio's, *Plastic's Republic*. So much more than a well-crafted collection of poetic musings on highfalutin, lofty subjects; this genre-bending collection, is a Barbie Bible for the Disenchanted. Her philosophical reflections, historical, sociological and personal verses on North America's most loved and most hated 20th century cultural icon, create a playhouse fit for kings, queens, misfits and lost souls who can't wait to revolt against the tyrannical, capitalist system that favors the strong over the weak, the young and pretty over the over-the-hillers. Despite Riccio's serious meditation on the

plastic Madonna of the West, this collection eschews the tirade against all that is no-damn-good about consumerism and its aftermath through the poet's nuanced, bittersweet take on the subject. For one thing, she never fails to remember that Barbie is a doll, and like any plaything, one has to have serious fun with it. The underlying theme suggests that, in life, Barbie and Ken should have a limited shelf-life; there is no need for adults to bring in the guillotine and decapitate the decadent pair – girls everywhere can figure it out--it's OK to toy with Barbie & Ken; what's imperfect has soul and is much easier to love.

Plastic's Republic will be released on April 1, and can be pre-ordered at <https://www.guernicaeditions.com/title/9781771833684>, on Amazon and Chapters-Indigo.

Plastic's Republic by Giovanna Riccio is included in the following Guernica Editions launches; please join us.

TORONTO:

6:00 PM- 8:30 PM, May 16th at the Columbus Centre, Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery

A Spring Book Launch: 6 New Books by Canadian Authors
Guernica Editions and Inanna Publications join up for an exciting book launch.

3:30 PM- 6 PM, June 9th at Supermarket Restaurant & Bar
Guernica's April 2019 Book Launch

MONTREAL:

6:30 PM-8 PM, May 2nd at Paragraphe Books
Guernica's Spring 2019 Blue Met Book Launch



ACCENTI MAGAZINE

ACCENTI, The Magazine with an Italian Accent. Read new articles and more at <https://www.accenti.ca/>
By Licia Canton

POETRY

by George Amabile
<http://www.accenti.ca/library/online-features/poetry-george-amabile-retrogram-news-of-the-world-after-sappho-fragment-21>

George Amabile on War, Trauma, the Creative Process, and His Collection *Martial Music*

by Liana Cusmano
<http://www.accenti.ca/george-amabile-on-war-trauma-the-creative-process-and-his-latest-collection-martial-music-by-liana-cusmano>

Aldo Del Col – Meritorious Service Medal Recipient

by Alex Vaillant-Gamelin
<http://www.accenti.ca/online-features/people/aldo-del-col-meritorious-service-medal-recipient-by-alex-vaillant-gamelin>

Italian-Canadian Writers Gather for Conference in Winnipeg

by Mélanie Grondin
<http://www.accenti.ca/library/online-features/italian-canadian-writers-gather-for-conference-in-winnipeg-by-m-lanie-grondin>

All a Whirlwind

by Glenn Carley
<http://www.accenti.ca/online-features/featurestories/all-a-whirlwind-by-glenn-carley>

Premio Italia nel Mondo 2018

by Darlene Madott
<http://www.accenti.ca/online-features/people/premio-italia-nel-mondo-2018-darlene-madott>

Marijuana Legalisation: An Italian-Canadian Perspective

by Alex Vaillant-Gamelin
<https://www.accenti.ca/library/online-features/marijuana-legalisation-an-italian-canadian-perspective-by-alex-vaillant-gamelin>

Write to accenti@accenti.ca to receive the e-newsletter.



Three Poems by Silvia Falsaperla

Mulberry Street

The blurry boulevard flanked by a hazy river
and the smudged dome at the end of the street,
the grayness of dawn
in the nether world of the new world.
I enter a confectionary,
the tables laden with berry tarts topped with cream
and artful boxed confections on the shelves.
A mustachioed man in a white apron
lurking by a doorway next to the baskets of bread,
leery-eyed, seems to be asking,
what does this dark-haired girl want
demurring at the red berry tarts?
Does she have any money to buy buns or tarts?
Diffident I step out on to a vast empty street
lined with streetcar tracks, steel
hardened by traces of snow and
foreign bone-deadening winter cold.

Something About Brenda

Brenda and I were middle school friends at St. Joseph's.
We were friends briefly.
She was tall and thin like me.
She wasn't Chinese; she was different.
There was something about her.
She had straight black hair, always windswept.
She was often silent, but it was the silence of the land.
She had black eyes that suggested trees and forests.
She walked like a free spirit as a hawk soars in the sky.
She was my winter friend.
I brought her to see my backyard covered in knee-deep snow,
The white mantel on the growing pine gave the shape
of a teepee.
She never payed attention in class, daydreaming about
lakes and rivers.
She knew more French than me, like the word *bouleau blanc*.
She had a long stride like a huntress.

She smiled shyly and knavishly like a crow.
I imagined I was like her.

As Far West

The lone traveller treads the deserted meaner streets of
Winnipeg
with fine names: Notre Dame, Balmoral.
Crows gather on top a wooden street pole, astute, cawing,
then fly off
to a known direction.
She is as far west as her feet have tread,
early morning or early dusk,
wary of men walking behind her.
Far from the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red River
she sees extensions of flat land and open skies,
extension and flatness of land new and rude to the eye, a
raw beauty to her classic eye.
Neighbourhood streets deserted and straight as shafts, trees
cast by a cold sun.
The lone traveller now a *coureur du bois* or *fille du roi* sees a
Cree, swift as wind,
not on a horse but a bike, wild-eyed and ruddy-faced, intent,
pursuing a hunt.
History is not effaced.
A new *habitante*, she is surprised by it in the depressed
streets that lead to her cheap hotel.
Crows regather and the common sparrows on the base of a
pre-winter bush are blue-winged.

©Silvia Falsaperla
204-267 St. George St.
Toronto, ON M5R 2P9
silvia.falsaperla@gmail.com



Through the Eyes of a Girl: Violence and Political Unrest in South America

By Francesca Schembri

The corner house under the Acacias, is a story relevant to the political unrest that ravage many countries, particularly Venezuela, in the present days. The author uses a first person's voice to narrate the dramatic experience lived by a teenager girl in the 1950s. The story develops from a starting point in the present triggered by an image published in a Canadian News Paper, to the days of violence ravaging a middle-class neighborhood in Caracas. The tragedies claiming many lives, are softened by adding innocence of historical political fact into the narration. To add dramatic effects the protagonist relies on the images of seeing her friends disappearing, tortured or killed while fighting for democracy. Even though, the days were filled by fear and the violent occurrences devastated many lives, the choice of words create an atmosphere of hope. The journey into the painful past, ends in the present by closing the page of *The Globe & Mail* into.

The photograph of the new elected Venezuelan vice president, published by the *Globe & Mail*, triggered memories of the tragic days we lived in the 1950s. Carlos lived in our neighborhood and he was also one of the very few whose names wouldn't be read in the list of the desaparecidos.

The corner house under the Acacias

By Francesca Schembri

Carlos was heavily involved with the political opposition of the actual regime. As a senior member of the *La Junta para la liberación de la patria*, he was responsible for investigating new recruits and reporting their eligibility to the top heads. His political ideologies were known, but this didn't slow him down. He felt compelled to participating: human lives were at stake. However, he took some precautions traveling under the pretense of being interested in the work of

an academic conferencier and by writing articles supporting the regime's policies.

Carlos was picked up by the federals while going home after attending one of the many meetings to support the Cause. He couldn't ignore the many struggling to free their beloved country from the oppression of a truce regime. For over a month, he had been suspicious of being under surveillance, yet he attended the Monday meeting as planned. Going back home, Carlos walked to his car parked 300 meters away, as normal as possible. It was dark: it seemed that the moon was collaborating with him by hiding beyond some menacing clouds. Yet, he was spotted, followed and dragged to an unknown place where he was thrown to the floor of a barred quarter.

He was released twenty-four hours later showing visible marks of the harsh methods used by the Guardia's to extract information from suspects. His lips were three times bigger than its normal and he had lost a few teeth. A few fractured ribs made difficult any deep breaths.

The monsters were counting on his patriotism to catch the organizer, once he would attend meetings again. For weeks Carlos kept by himself and silent as if he had lost his voice. Years after, my brother would say, "...but he didn't talk or betrayed los compañeros". For a while Carlos kept silence as if he had lost his voice.

Thereafter, Carlos noticed he was still watched. "They wouldn't be taken to the places where the opposition's political meetings were held by him", he promised.

His mother was instructed to go to the market and spread the news that his son was travelling to Europe. It was the conveyed signal of a threat. Two months went by and nothing happened. The meetings were carried out as scheduled. The police didn't seem to care, but a few men and a woman were missing; the tension grew among the participants.

The meetings continued: smaller groups, places and times changed. They met under bridges, open markets and soccer fields. Couple of times a week a few women and children would visit with Carlos' mother. Wearing their dresses, he would sneak out to come home hidden in the grocer's truck



Member Showcase

or dressed as a guy delivering goods. Some meetings were carried on in his house. In those instances, people would bring their instruments and music was played aloud until early morning.

A few months after, Carlos was formally accused of conspiring against Perez Jimenez and arrested. For over a year he was kept in a dark and humid calabozo and as many others, he was left uncommunicated and tortured. Unlike others, he survived the tortures, the deprivations and the solitude to come home to his mother, proudly wearing his scars for the rest of his life. I folded the newspaper and closed my eyes.

Images of the times, people and places floated in my mind. I couldn't help thinking about my brother's involvement with la junta and all the other university students who fought for democracy. Predominant was Ana's image, my dear friend; and the circumstances that led into her mysterious disappearance were puzzling me still; facts which I haven't been able to forget.

I met Ana at church a few weeks after we settled in the Venezuelan capital. Usually, we would attend earlier mass, but that morning we went for the Eleven mass, and there she was praying at the Madonna's feet. Her expression was very intense, and I couldn't help steering at her; she was graceful: her eyes were of an incredible green color and her nose had the classic shape of a Greek goddess. As she took a seat near me, her beauty triggered my brother's attention. "Linda! "Quién es ella?"

The question was answered by Carlos who introduced us to her. Politely she whispered, "Ana Guerra Valdez, mucho gusto". Luis took the initiative of asking her to join us for an ice-cream. She declined the invitation evasively; then took her leave. My brother's eyes followed her in wonder. Not giving it up, he invited her again the following Sunday, and the Sunday after that. By then, there had been some changes and finally she accepted the invitation. Accidentally, I had discovered where Ana lived, and a friendly rapport was on the making.

Since we moved in the neighborhood, on Sundays I would often sneak out to venture in exploratory missions. My mother did not approve of me taking a stroll alone, but I would go just the same while my parents were siesting. The acacia blossoms were so inviting that I couldn't resist the temptation of promenading under the arches of the trees lined up in both sides of our street. That afternoon, particularly, one of them stimulated my interest, so I made my way towards it. Once there, however, I forgot about my initial purpose: the corner house, whose yard hosted some, captured my attention. Its architecture was rather stylish: the windows were heavily draped with vermillion brocade panels; unusual for the tropical climate. That awaked my curiosity!

The contrast between the look of the house and the garden was sharp: except for the lime color of the wooden louvers, at that moment opened, everything about the house looked severe. The art work in the protective iron bars embracing the outside of windows, was identical to the one adorning the gate and the circular fence surrounding the bungalow. I felt a strange sensation of a non-tangible nature. Not as sensual as the ones triggered by the acacia's blossoms, yet equally intense.

Conjectures and more conjectures freed my curious mind for a few seconds, until a dancing branch, proudly displaying flowers as big as my parasol, diverted my attention from the windows to what became my last discovery of the day. A rope tied around the branch was holding a homemade swing which was bouncing by a welcoming wind blowing gently in the hot afternoon. Without thinking it twice, I trespassed and run towards the swing, sat on it and closing my eyes swang high and low slowly.

A feminine voice spoiled the moment: my first impulse was of jumping over the fence, when a feminine voice spoiled the moment: "Hola" It was Ana. "I didn't know you lived in this house", I answered. "I know... andale mecete!", which I did. We spent the next Ten minutes exchanging personal information. She was eager to know about my country of birth, my family and the reason why we made Caracas our home. The decision of moving to Caracas was made by my father who wanted to provide us with better schooling opportunities. We had lived in the eastern part of Venezuela, where had previously established a business. My



Member Showcase

pregnant mother and I had spent some time in the Estado Tachira after my mother took ill. Her doctor suggested that a more temperate climate would do her good. "Two months after my sister was born and we moved here", I told her. Ana's eyes lit with curiosity wanting to know more about the baby.

Then was my turn to ask questions: Ana said little about her self. She spoke softly, moving her rose lips slowly. I learned more about his brother's dog, than about her. She didn't have any relatives in the city; her family was small only her dad, a brother and herself: Her mother had died in a car accident when she was only six months old. Business was keeping him away from home for long periods and at times she felt very lonely.

Completely absorbed by her charming personality, I had forgotten to return home before my parents would wonder my where about. I was about to take a leave, when suddenly I felt someone's presence. Instinctively, I turned my head to the right and my eyes meet two of the saddest eyes I had ever seen in my young life. They belonged to an older gentleman, who, later I learned, was a History professor and Ana's father. He addressed me with manners, "Buenas tardes, please, excuse my daughter. She must take her medicine, now". Ana invited me to go back another day and to bring my baby sister along. She showed me to the gate silently, and then followed her father in the house. I couldn't help thinking that added to his distinguished look, there was something mysterious about him. I mentioned it to my brother: pulling one of my golden curls, he suggested that I should stop reading Agatha Christie's books and concentrate in children literature only. A couple evening after, my parents drove me to the library and passing by Ana's quinta my curiosity was unleashed further Under the new moon light its surreal look astonished me. The heavily dressed windows were blocking the view to intruders' eyes, yet I felt unease. I couldn't stop wondering what they were hiding... and to whom?

The next day, Ana left school in a hurry. She would hardly walk home with me after school; always having an excuse, her father was picking her up later; she had to return a book to a compañera, or she had to see her

Spanish professor. She was in her last year of high school, and I was getting ready to finish completing my junior years.

Yet, the age gap didn't seem to prevent us of enjoying each other's company. At summer break, Ana and I would see each other frequently. Usually, we would seat under the acacia to chat our hearts away. Occasionally we strolled together or go for an ice cream on Sundays, of course, escorted by Carlos, Luigi and Octavio, her brother.

Strangely, since he showed up with Ana at my birthday party her brother and mine became friends. My parents were captivated of their mannerism! Ana was often invited by them for breakfast after church. However, declined the invitation to my brother's 22nd birthday party. He concluded that professor Guerra did not approve of any relationship with her and soon diverted his attention towards another girl. I continued to grow physically and intellectually, most importantly, Ana and I grew a wonderful true friendship. My mother tried to mother her as well.

Spring had begun bringing some political unrest. In a couple of instances Ana expressed her concerns about her brother and mine fearing for them, never mentioning their political affiliations. I did not understand much about politics, but I comforted her "No tes preocupes tanto." The politic tensions spread to all states to the point of triggering reprisals by the dictator whose guardias raided schools and terrified professors and students alike. By December a considerable number of intellectuals were arrested. Colleges and secondary schools had to reduce courses for shortage of staff. A great number of students missed classes or were kept at home, including me. Universities courses were reduced to minim and other Educational institutions remained closed indefinitely.

Young men, unemployed and unsatisfied, organized protests. Cities' jails were getting filled with angry crowd. Homes were raided daily. Men and women were found dead shat at their backs. Terrorized, mothers feared for their children. Men were living under the menace of getting arrested, and wives would implore them to stay home. Yet, despite the fear, we felt strong about ending the terrible regime and hoped for a democratic government.



Member Showcase

The seasons changed to a glorious fall preceding winter. It brought more overt violence and fear augmented. The most celebrated festivity of all seasons approached, but as many others we kept the celebrations of Christmas to a low minimum. My parents organized a dinner party to celebrate the coming of the Divine Baby and our friends were invited. Octavio came alone and excused his sister, "Ana is not feeling well again. My father wants to send her to the Andes for a couple of weeks, until she recovers", said it avoiding my eyes. The next day, I called upon her, but no one answered the door. A neighbor, insisted she had seen Ana leaving in a black Mercury, driven by a chauffeur dressed in a blue uniform. I couldn't believe that she had left without a word, without saying goodbye and leaving me wondering about her sudden departure. "She will be back in a shake, you'll see", my mother promised. I did not see Ana ever again.

For a couple of Sundays, I didn't attend mass. I couldn't! It was painful going to the late Eighteen century church, knowing that Ana would not be there. She had been my friend since 1955 and not once, she had left town, nor ever had left me wondering about her where about.

An early evening of January, I was in my room still very disappointed at my friend, when I heard a knock. Without any reason whatever, I felt a chill running throughout my back. I had a premonition! I did not answer the call. I was almost certain that the opening of the door would change my life for ever: indeed, it did. A few minutes after, my mother handed me a note taken from Blackie's mouth, Octavio's German Sheppard. In the note Octavio asked me to take care of his dog, while he was gone.

Blackie became mine to the end of his life. I didn't see Octavio or Ana ever again. Seven months before the coup that ended Perez Jimenez's dictatorship in January 1958, my brother left home for an unknown place. I was told that he had left with a married girl. Sad months were ahead of me.

A part of the deprived population dwindling into the rhetoric traps and ex-convicts revolted against

immigrants who owned businesses accusing them of becoming wealthy by taking from them. Not nationalized immigrants were thrown out of their houses under machetes menaces, their businesses vandalized and bank accounts were frozen, houses. We moved to a smaller city in a country house. Often, I would see my mother crying. I could not understand enough reasons for my gentle natured father not to forgiving his son.

Finally, a sort of order was restored and some of my questions were answered. "You understand that we kept you on the dark for your own protection," my father said gravely. "The two Guerras were accused of treason, arrested and killed without a fair trial. He continued saying that Luis believed in the cause and had been involved with the guild by helping as a recruiter of new members. He was arrested the day after Octavio was killed, but miraculously released two months after my father paid an exorbitant sum for his freedom and agreed that he had to leave Venezuela. We did not find better excuse than say that he was not welcomed back home for taking away another man's wife, of course it was a lie, my mother said.

"No one knows what happened to Ana." There is a speculation that she was taken to the Virgin Islands to become a commodity for militaries and politicians' sex enjoyment", my mother added. My heart sunk! My poor friend, so delicate, so innocent! faced a cruel destiny! Yet, I'm sure, she did it with dignity as this was her style. In 1963 our family safely reunited in Toronto.

I dug out some old photographs: looking at them, I finally find some relief in a river of tears. One of the friends was harvesting on behalf of all who fought for democracy. He was about to be sworn in as the third Venezuelan democratic vice presidents and claiming justice for all the pain, torture and suffering inflicted to all, the ones killed, the ones who still are in the list of the desparecidos, and the ones who are living with scars. I cried for my friends, but the tears running to my lips tasted less bitter than had been in the past. These, perhaps, had the taste of freedom.



**BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!
DEVENEZ MEMBRE AUJOURD'HUI!
DIVENTA SOCIO OGGI!**

CONTACT INFO / COORDONNÉES / DATI PERSONALI:

First Name/Prénom/Nome:		Middle Name/ Deuxième prénom/ Secondo nome	
Last Name/ Nom de famille/ Cognome		Salutation/ Titre/ Titolo	
Street / Adresse / Via e numero civico			
City / Ville/ Città		Province/State / Province/ État / Provincia	
Country / Pays / Stato		Postal Code / Zip Code/ Code postal / CAP	
Telephone/ Telefono (home / maison/ casa)		Telephone/ Telefono (work / travail / ufficio)	
Email		Website / Site Web / Sito Internet	
Areas of Interest / Champ d'intérêts/ Interessi			
Biography/ Biographie / Biografia (475 characters max)			

New or Returning Member: New/ Nouveau / Nuovo Renewal / Renouvellement / Rinnovo

Choose One

<input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 CAD —Voting member/ Membre votant / Socio con diritto di voto (1 year/an/anno)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175.00 CAD —Voting member/ Membre votant / Socio con diritto di voto (2 years/ans/anni)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 CAD —Associate member / Membre associé/ Socio Ordinario (1 year/an/anno)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$175.00 CAD — Associate member / Membre associé/ Socio Ordinario (2 years/ans/anni)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00 CAD —Student member/ Membre étudiant / Socio student (1 year/an/anno)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 CAD —Supporter / Sostenitore

Please make all cheques payable to the Association / Les chèques doivent être faits au nom de l'association/ Gli assegni debbono essere intestati all'associazione

Please mail the completed form accompanied by a cheque or money order to:

S'il vous plaît envoyer le formulaire complété accompagné d'un chèque ou un mandat à:

Si prega di inviare per posta il modulo completato, accompagnato da un assegno o un vaglia a:

International: please send money orders. *À l'étranger: il est préférable d'envoyer des mandats. Estero: si prega di inviare vaglia.*

**Association of Italian Canadian Writers
2742 East Georgia Street
Vancouver, BC V5K 2K2 Canada**