

**Transatlantic Correspondents:
Kinship, Gender and Emotions in Postwar Migration Experiences between Italy and
Canada, 1946-1971**

Sonia Cancian

A Thesis

In

The Humanities Doctoral Program

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ABSTRACT

Transatlantic Correspondents: Kinship, Gender and Emotions in Postwar Migration Experiences between Italy and Canada, 1946-1971

Sonia Cancian, Ph.D.
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This doctoral dissertation examines the impact of migration experienced by migrants to Canada and loved ones in Italy through the lens of personal correspondence. It focuses on the three decades immediately following the Second World War when the largest migration of Italians to Canada took place. Through a detailed content analysis of over 400 private letters belonging to six families, the thesis examines how kin and lovers in Canada and Italy negotiated their separation as a result of migration.

The study addresses two main research questions: First, what do the private letters of individuals reveal about the impact of migration experienced by Italian migrants in Canada and their kin and lovers who remained in Italy during the postwar years? Second, what strategies and social, cultural and emotional responses to migration do the letters reveal from the viewpoint of these actors? The 800 letters in the original archive that I created, of which over 400 are the object of analysis, are for the purposes of this study primary sources that cast a new light on the most personal thoughts and feelings of diverse actors who engaged in the process of migration.

The thesis offers a twofold analysis of the letters. First, it examines the functional role of the letters and their materiality as objects that served to bridge distances between family members and lovers by communicating information, news, advice and affection. Second, the thesis analyzes the contents of the letters by focusing on three characteristic

themes. First, it reveals the importance of kinship in migration and examines how networks of support and control were exerted through the medium of letters. Second, it shows how the realities of migration were constructed and experienced according to dominant gender norms. Finally, the thesis demonstrates the extraordinary range and intensity of emotions that characterized letter-writers' responses to migration and the experience of separation from family and loved ones. The thesis provides additional evidence for the obvious point that migration had an enormous impact on the lives of migrants and their families. But more importantly, it shows the various ways in which individuals attempted to comprehend, engage with, and explain the profound changes they experienced daily and over time.

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My warmest gratitude is extended to the individuals in Canada and Italy who have generously shared with me their letters and their life stories as migrants and as those who remained behind. Without their trust, care and friendship, and their family's letters, this thesis would not have come into existence.

Finally, I thank my children, Lorenzo and Arianna for their love and understanding, and for their enthusiasm as they accompanied me on this journey. This thesis is for them.

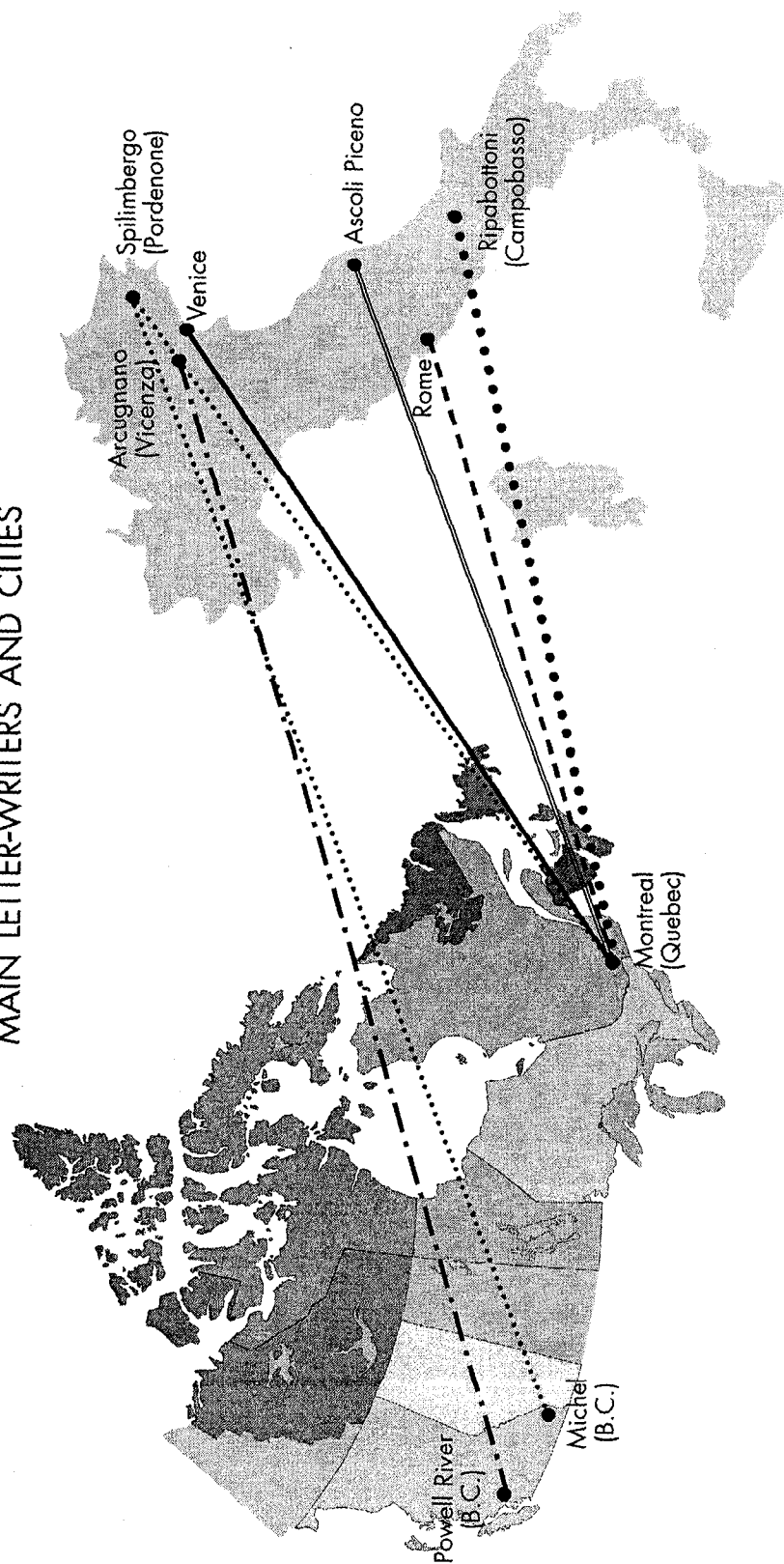
DEDICATION

For Lorenzo and Arianna

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MAIN LETTER-WRITERS AND CITIES



Dante del Moro in Powell River, B.C. ↔ Sara Franceschetti in Arcugnano, Vicenza
 Gianluenzo Colonello in Michel, B.C. and Montreal ↔ Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica in Spilimbergo, Pordenone
 Clara Montorio in Montreal ↔ Maurizio Trevisan in Venice
 Clara Montorio and Maurizio Trevisan in Montreal ↔ Laura Adaggi in Venice
 Maddalena Franchi in Montreal ↔ Daniela Perini in Ascoli Piceno
 Lucia Valessi and Domenico Losanto in Montreal ↔ Carmela Losanto in Ripabottoni, Campobasso
 Ester di Leonardi in Montreal ↔ Giordano Rossini in Rome

Introduction “*It was like seeing you here...*”¹

*Caro figlio Gianlorenzo (Dear son Gianlorenzo)... thank you for the dollars that you sent us through the hands of your friend. It was like seeing you here. How much I would pay to have you here... .*²

This dissertation begins with a mother’s words to her son written in 1956 in Spilimbergo, Italy. Marianna Domenica had just received a letter from Gianlorenzo through the hands of a friend who was also living in Montreal. Following the friend’s visit, she immediately sat at the kitchen table and wrote to Gianlorenzo describing in a few words her *pensiero* (concerns and thoughts) prompted by receiving his long-awaited letter.

In the migration process, correspondence is one of the key sources of communication bridging loved ones³ across distances, near or far. While scholars throughout the 20th century have explored a number of facets of correspondence exchanged in the process of migration, recent years have seen the publication of a number

¹ “*Mi sembrava da vederti te...*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

Throughout the dissertation, all excerpts of the letters have been transcribed as per the original spelling, syntax and punctuation. The translation from Italian to English of all letter quotations are mine. To preserve the confidentiality of the letter-writers, all names have been changed to pseudonyms.

² “*Caro figlio Gianlorenzo... grazie dei dollari che ci ai mandato per le mani del tuo compagno mi sembrava da vederti te quanto pagherei a vederti...*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

³ The expression, “loved ones,” is borrowed from: Robert F. Harney, “Men without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930,” *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America*, eds. Betty Boy Caroli, Robert F. Harney and Lydio F. Tomasi (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978) 79-102. Throughout the thesis, “loved ones” refers to migrants’ significant others in the homeland.

of exciting collections of scholarly works on the immigrant letter. New conceptual frameworks, new analytical approaches, and ever-widening opportunities for working with letters exchanged between migrants and their loved ones have been the hallmark of this scholarship. Within a few short months of each other, three important studies (Gerber 2006, Elliott, Gerber and Sinke 2006, Frenette, Martel and Willis 2006) appeared and demonstrated the range of research and methodologies being applied to the study of private correspondence resulting from migration.⁴

This thesis addresses two main research questions: First, what do the private letters of ordinary individuals reveal about the impact of migration experienced by Italian migrants in Canada and their kin and lovers who remained in Italy during the postwar years? Second, what strategies and social, cultural and emotional responses to migration do the letters reveal from the viewpoint of these actors? Drawing on an analysis of over 400 private letters (of the original 800 letters I have archived) belonging to six different families, this study contributes to the rapidly growing scholarly interest in immigrants' letters by exploring the multiple layers of significance they hold both historically and anthropologically. The letters that I have analysed have been drawn from the original archive that I created, and they are the primary source for this study. These letters are unique in scope and original in the sense that they have never previously been archived or analysed. Both individually and collectively, they offer a new source on the history of postwar Italian migration to Canada. Intensely private in nature, the letters take us inside

⁴ David Gerber, *Authors of their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke, eds. *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); and Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis, eds. *Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones* (Québec: les presses de l'Université Laval, 2006).

the hearts and minds of ordinary people whose personal and family identities and circumstances were most affected by the realities of migration.⁵

My interest in the topic stems from an earlier project that was conceived for my Master of Arts thesis in which I examined nineteen immigrants' letters belonging to four families in Canada. The goal of my Master's work was to offer a detailed linguistic analysis of the letters in order to explore linguistic deviations in the language. I argued that the deviations visible in this correspondence did not signify errors of standard Italian, but rather expressed linguistic solutions to language problems that emerged in a bilingual environment. Apart from their linguistic significance, however, I have become increasingly fascinated by letters as a form of communication. Not only do letters allow people to stay connected despite the physical and temporal distances separating them, but their intrinsically private nature make them an ideal vehicle for glimpsing the inner stories of ordinary people that are often hidden from mainstream history. In addition to these scholarly motives I have also become increasingly interested in the study of migration and letters for personal reasons, as I have sought to understand more fully a past that belongs to my parents who immigrated from Italy to Canada in the early 1950s.

This study explores the interconnections between personal correspondence and migration, and illustrates the links and continuities shared between kin and lovers in transnational households.⁶ An archive of over 800 letters—located in private households of Italian immigrants in Canada--has been created for the purposes of this thesis. Over

⁵ To my knowledge, Robert F. Harney (1978) is among the first historians to acknowledge the importance of studying migration through the first-hand experiences and words of migrants themselves.

⁶ The terms "transnational households" and "transnational families" are used interchangeably in this thesis to mean, "families whose core members are located in at least two nation-states." See Rhacel S. Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

400 letters from this original archive are the primary source on which my analysis is based.

The scope of the thesis is two-fold. On one level, it examines the functional role of the letters and their materiality as objects that served to bridge distances and enable the communication of information, news, sentiments and concerns across vast distances. On another level, the study explores a number of social and cultural dynamics that operate in the content of the letters by revealing how individuals negotiated their separation from their families, lovers and communities. The thesis describes the myriad ways in which people affected by migration exerted mechanisms of social support and control across kin networks, paying particular attention to how gender relations were reified and reinforced in a context of migration. Finally, my work explores how the experience and expression of emotions at a distance were intensely part of the language of separation shared between migrants and loved ones.

This thesis makes two original contributions to scholarship. First, by examining the experiences of migrants and loved ones in Italy and Canada, it advances knowledge about Italian migration to Canada. Second, it contributes to the scholarly literature about the power of correspondence in explaining the history of ordinary people's lives.

This introductory chapter has three objectives. First, it examines the literature that has been produced since the early 20th century on the theme of letters and migration. Second, it describes the fieldwork that was undertaken to retrieve the letters and build the archive and database that is the evidentiary basis of the thesis. Finally, the chapter identifies some of the conceptual questions addressed by the thesis and discusses the methodology that I have used to analyze the letters as historical documents.

A) Literature Review

One of the influential works in the literature about the personal correspondence of ordinary folk is the five-volume sociological analysis by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920). Their text examines social change “that highlighted the interplay of subjective and objective factors.”⁷ In addition to using first-person documents, Thomas and Znaniecki examined thousands of private letters written by ordinary individuals in Poland and the United States in order to illustrate social change among ‘peasants’ from a positivist viewpoint.⁸ This comparative study of migrants and their families in both nation-states is among the first scholarly investigations that recognized the letters of immigrants and loved ones as a valuable source of analysis. Grounded in the use of letters written by “ordinary people” (that is, people who live primarily oral lives and who do not normally employ literary expression in their everyday lives) and reprinted in their original form, *The Polish Peasant* set the standard for what became known as the “collection format” approach to the narrative of migration. Subsequent studies that also draw from letters of ordinary people to illustrate immigrant experiences include Blegen (1955), Conway (1961), Erickson (1972), Barton (1975), Hale (1984), Wtulich et al. (1986), Houston and Smyth (1990), Kamphoefner et

⁷ Eli Zaretsky, “Editor’s Introduction,” *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, ed. Eli Zaretsky (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 3.

⁸ For a discussion on the distinctions between a positivist versus populist frame of analysis in relation to immigrant letters, see David A. Gerber, “The Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Populism: the Uses of Immigrant Personal Correspondence in Twentieth-Century American Scholarship,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16.4 (Summer 1997): 3-34.

al. (1991), Fitzpatrick (1994), Brinks (1995), Cameron, Haines and Maude (2000), and Miller et al. (2003).⁹

One of the limitations of Thomas' and Znaniecki's analysis is that it leaves "a vast, puzzling gap... between the interesting, casual insights on individual letter-series and the highly schematized renderings of their significance in the concluding 'Methodological Note,'" which both authors viewed as a major contribution to sociology.¹⁰ Thomas' and Znaniecki's introduction to the notion of the "bowing letter," (that is the letter that typically opened with salutations and hopes of well-being from the letter-writer to the addressee) as "one fundamental type [of all peasant letters], whose form results from its function and remains always essentially the same, even if it eventually degenerates," was at one time acknowledged as an important element in typifying the "peasant" letters written in a context of migration. However, recent contributions by new social historians have catapulted the notion of the "bowing letter" into contentious terrain. As an expert on

⁹ Theodore Blegen, *Land of their Choice. The Immigrants Write Home* (St Paul, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Alan Conway, ed. *The Welsh in America. Letters from the Immigrants* (St. Paul, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1961); Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in 19th Century America* (Coral Gables, Fl.: Miami University Press, 1972); Arnold Barton, *Letters from the Promised Land. Swedes in America, 1840-1914* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975); Frederick Hale, ed. *Danes in North America* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984); Josephine Wtulich et al., eds. *Writing Home: Immigrants in Brazil and the United States, 1890-1891* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Cecil Houston and William Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links, and Letters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, eds. *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Herbert Brinks, ed. *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Wendy Cameron, Sheila Haines and Mary M. Maude, eds. *English Immigrant Voices: Labourers' Letters from Upper Canada in the 1830s* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); and Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, David N. Doyle, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Thomas and Znaniecki, quoted in Robert E. L. Faris, *Chicago Sociology 1920-1932* (Chicago, 1970) 17. Cited in Gerber, "The Immigrant Letter Between Positivism" 3.

Irish immigrants' letters David Fitzpatrick argues, these scholars "were content to reproduce what they deemed 'typical' examples without exploring variations between writers."¹¹ Paradoxically, current historians, anthropologists and other scholars interested in letters of migration have been drawn to letters in large part because of the heterogeneity in their content and context as well as the sheer variety of writers expressing their personal thoughts and experiences.

Ironically, while *The Polish Peasant* was not conceived by its authors as a contribution to advancing knowledge about population movements, several letters in the collection were written by or to immigrants in the United States and their kin in Poland. The inclusion of letters from Poland was doubly important because "letters sent to emigrants from Europe are much less represented among surviving documents in archived collections of letters than letters sent to Europe by immigrants."¹² Another reason for this void is likely due to the predominant emphasis by historians that the immigration experience is best embodied on privileging immigrants themselves rather than those who were left behind. The general consensus among migration scholars was that these letters would, as historian George Stephenson observes, "betray the spirit, hopes, and aspirations of the humble folk who tilled the soil, felled the forest, and tended the loom."¹³ Following Thomas' and Znaniecki's study, historians such as Marcus Hansen, George Stephenson, and Theodore Blegen provided important insights into the significance of ordinary people's letters in the study of migration. Whether their

¹¹ Fitzpatrick 21.

¹² David Gerber, "What is it we seek to find in first-person documents? Documenting society and cultural practices in Irish immigrant writings," *Reviews in American History* 32 (2004): 308.

¹³ George Stephenson, "When America was the Land of Canaan," *Minnesota History* 10.3 (Sept. 1929): 237.

motivations for throwing a more democratic lens on immigrants' letters were personal or political, these three Scandinavian-American historians—theirself, children of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian immigrant parents, respectively—“created a powerful language... to justify their interest.”¹⁴ Their works reflected the extent to which they viewed the immigrant letter as “a great spur to mass migration, which certainly transformed both Europe and North America, and linked their histories inseparably.”¹⁵ In light of their socially egalitarian approach, Gerber observes that, in contrast to Thomas' and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant*, “a good deal of the democratic feeling about the subjects and purposes of history that moved Stephenson, Hansen, and Blegen is still very much with us.”¹⁶

The advent of the New Social History movement in the late 1960s and 1970s also contributed to an interest in immigration through its valorization of ordinary people's lives. The appearance of Charlotte Erickson's work, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in 19th Century America* (1972), set a new precedent in the study of letters of migration. In this empirical work, Erickson used as primary sources previously unavailable immigrant letters that she had located privately among several families in England.¹⁷ Grouped in individual letter-series according to the labour occupation groups with which the letter-writers were associated in North America, her class-based analysis contextualized each set of letters and endeavoured to understand

¹⁴ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 40.

¹⁵ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 41.

¹⁶ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 43.

¹⁷ Both works that preceded Erickson's, Theodore Blegen's *Land of their Choice* (1955) and Alan Conway's *The Welsh in America* (1961) used previously published letters as primary sources.

how immigrants and their families adjusted to the agricultural, industrial, professional, clerical and commercial labour markets in the United States. By allowing the letters to “speak for themselves,” Erickson drew attention not only to how typical these letters are, but also to the writers’ motives for emigration; their networks of distribution and the economic and social adjustment they confronted. Erickson’s work also broke new ground with its inclusion of a contextual analysis describing the variety of migration processes experienced by the immigrant letter-writers and the local conditions they were subject to in the United States.¹⁸

Yet, in spite of her sensitivity to class- and labour-based issues that are linked to the migration process, Erickson claimed that “few of these letters may be said to have literary merit.”¹⁹ By contrast, historian David Fitzpatrick responded to Erickson’s comment by arguing that, “spelling, syntax, and design obviously reflected the cultural and educational background of the writers, but they were also instrumental in conveying messages to readers with a view to influencing their responses.”²⁰

Following British historian Frank Thistlethwaite’s call in 1960 for greater emphasis on continuity and links between sending and receiving societies and for the examination of “the process of migration as a complete sequence of experiences”²¹ historians began to explore the phenomenon of migration from a transnational perspective. This new direction in migration studies may have acted as a catalyst for some historians to later

¹⁸ Erickson 3.

¹⁹ Erickson 1.

²⁰ Fitzpatrick 22.

²¹ Frank Thistlethwaite, “Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” (1960) reprinted in *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930*, eds. Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 22.

locate letters by families and individuals who remained in their homelands, but as the recent burgeoning of scholarship in migration studies demonstrates, the emphasis has remained on the experiences of migrants rather than on those of the migrants' loved ones who remained behind.²²

Two important works that bring to light both sides of the correspondence exchanged between immigrants in the Americas and their families who remained in the homeland appeared in the last decade of the twentieth century, within eight years of each other.

First, Samuel Baily and Franco Ramella's *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence across the Atlantic, 1901-1922* (1988)²³ came into being as a result of a fortuitous discovery of 208 letters of personal correspondence exchanged between two parents, Luigi and Margherita Sola and their sons, Oreste and Abele Sola who had emigrated from Biella, Italy to Buenos Aires. This work provided a useful introduction to

²² A number of important works are: Fortunata Piselli, *Parentela ed emigrazione. Mutamenti e continuità in una comunità calabrese* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981); Vito Teti, "Note sui comportamenti delle donne sole degli americani durante la 1a emigrazione in Calabria," *Studi Emigrazione/Etudes Migrations* 24 (1987):13-46; Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); Linda Reeder, *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, Sicily, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2001); Bruna Bianchi, "Lavoro ed emigrazione femminile (1880-1915)," *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, eds. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2001) 257-274; Franca Iacovetta and Donna R. Gabaccia, eds. *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Caroline Brettell, *Men who Migrate, Women who Wait: Population and History in a Portuguese Parish* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Sally Cole, *Women of the Praia: Work and Lives in a Portuguese Coastal Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and for a global perspective, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). Among the handful of works that include letters from the homeland are: David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Judith Beattie and Helen Buss, eds. *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-57* (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia, 2003). While Beattie and Buss (2003) is based on the undelivered correspondence sent to the Hudson's Bay workers in North America, it nonetheless provides a window into the mental and social worlds of the individuals and families who remained in their homeland. Consider also, Andrey Pyée, "'Mon Révérend Père, [...] Je m'inquiète pour mon fils.' Relations familiales transnationales et épistolaires," Frenette, Martel and Willis, *Envoyer et recevoir* 201-226.

²³ Samuel Baily and Franco Ramella, *One Family, Two Worlds. An Italian Family's Correspondence across the Atlantic, 1901-1922* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

the period and offered a brief overview of the literature on migration and letters. As Baily and Ramella suggest, this collection offered “a major contribution to the literature on Italian migration to the New World and to migration literature in general.”²⁴

One study that analyses themes emerging from the letters of both immigrants and their kin who remained behind is David Fitzpatrick’s *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (1994). Fitzpatrick’s study is important for several reasons beyond its contribution to Irish and Australian history. By analyzing 111 letters exchanged between fourteen sets of correspondents, he provides a glimpse into the personal and social worlds of Irish immigrants in Australia and their loved ones in Ireland in the 19th century as their lives changed because of migration.

Arguably, Fitzpatrick was the first historian to recognize that letters moving in both directions are equally part of the experience of migration. As he argued, “we need to discover the relationships of those mentioned by name, the events to which allusions are made, the social and economic contexts in both worlds. We need also to be alert to awkward silences and evasions, and to seek clues to other origins.”²⁵

In contrast to many previous scholars, Fitzpatrick also acknowledged that the letters “cannot truly ‘speak for themselves’”—a position that is in stark contrast to the premise in *The Polish Peasant* and many subsequent works. Through a three-fold “bottom-up”

²⁴ Baily and Ramella 5. In recent years, Italian historians have been active in the production and discussion of works related to letters of migration. The international conference, “Ocean of Sounds,” held in June 2004 at the University of Genoa and the *Archivio ligure della scrittura popolare* was one of several initiatives that underscore the contribution of ordinary letters in a context of migration. Refer also to Antonio Gibelli, “‘Fatemi unpo sapere...’ Scrittura e fotografia nella corrispondenza degli emigranti liguri,” *La via delle Americhe. L’emigrazione ligure tra evento e racconto. Catalogo della mostra*, ed. Antonio Gibelli (Genova: Sagep, 1989) 83-94; and Antonio Gibelli and Fabio Caffarena, “Le lettere degli emigranti,” *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana. Vol. 1 Partenze*, eds. Pietro Bevilacqua, Emilio Franzina and Maddalena Tirabassi (Rome: Donzelli, 2001) 563-574. An earlier work on Italian migration and letters is E. Franzina, *Merica! Merica! Emigrazione e colonizzazione nelle lettere dei contadini veneti e friulani in America Latina, 1876-1902* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979).

²⁵ Fitzpatrick vii-viii.

strategy that includes complete transcriptions of the letters, detailed commentaries on the texts and a thematic analysis, Fitzpatrick provided important insights into the daily preoccupations of migrants and their kin in both Ireland and Australia. Through these “family chronicles” written by men and women between 1843 and 1906, he explores a wide range of topics from family politics to the organization of migration. In addition to dealing with issues related to identity such as faith, loneliness, health, and dreams, Fitzpatrick’s book examines themes such as the contrast between Irish origins and Australian outcomes, and explores the meaning of nostalgia and the homeland in migration. To reconstitute these stories, Fitzpatrick, like Erickson and later Gerber, draws his findings from private letters of ordinary individuals engaged in a process of migration, and from other sources (genealogies, biographies and local histories) that contribute a more complete picture of the concerned letter-writers.

Other important works on letters and the Irish diaspora include Patrick O’Farrell’s *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825-1929* (1984), Donald H. Akenson’s *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860-1950* (1990), and *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (2003) by Kerby Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce Boling and David Doyle.²⁶

Kerby Miller’s *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985) also draws from immigrant letters to provide an historical analysis of

²⁶ Patrick O’Farrell (with Brian Trainor), *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825-1929* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press and Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1984); Donald H. Akenson, *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860-1950* (Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 1990); and Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, David N. Doyle, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Irish immigration to North America from 1607 to 1921. In his study of the notion of exile among Irish immigrants, Miller analysed over 5 000 family letters retrieved in Canada and the United States, Great Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to Miller, “millions of Irishmen and –women, whatever their objective reasons for emigration, approached their departures and their experiences in North America with an outlook which characterized emigration as exile.”²⁷

Two other studies that analyze the historical significance of letters in the context of migration are *Distant Magnets* (1993) co-edited by Dirk Hoerder and Horst Rössler and Dirk Hoerder’s *Creating Societies* (1999).²⁸ Both works use personal accounts, including letters retrieved from public archives to explore the mental and social worlds of immigrants in various parts of the globe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Likewise, Hoerder’s study, *Creating Societies*, offers a historical analysis of Canadian immigrant societies from the 1840s to the 1950s through the use of first-person published accounts, including letters and memoirs. As this brief literature review suggests, the 1990s saw the publication of several important studies on migration and personal correspondence. The re-evaluation of *The Polish Peasant* in the *Journal of American Ethnic History* (1996) coincided with a surge in interest about the personal correspondence of ordinary people²⁹

²⁷ Miller 8. For an elaborate critique of the work, see Donald H. Akenson, “Reading the Texts of Rural Immigrants: Letters from the Irish in Australia, New Zealand, and North America,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History* VII (1990): 387-406.

²⁸ Dirk Hoerder and Horst Rössler, eds. *Distant Magnets: Expectations and Realities in the Immigrant Experience, 1840-1930* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1993). Dirk Hoerder, *Creating Societies. Immigrant Lives in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999). A study that analyses letters of migration from a literary perspective is Stephen Fender, *Sea Changes: British Emigration and American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁹ Among the studies that appeared in these years by French historians and literary critics on the theme of letters and the writings of ordinary people are: Roger Chartier, ed. *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIX siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Daniel Fabre, ed. *Par Ecrit. Ethnologie des écritures quotidiennes* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1997) and the full-length issue of no.

exemplified by David Gerber's seven articles on migration correspondence, the first of which appeared in 1997.³⁰

More recently, Gerber's study, *Authors of their Lives* (2006) examines the cycle of correspondence exchanged between immigrants and their significant others and demonstrates the role of letters in reformulating and sustaining personal identities and relationships that have been disrupted as a result of migration. This study, which is drawn from seventy-one letter-series written in the United States, Canada, England, Scotland and Wales sets innovative new standards for scholars who draw on letters of migration for their historical analyses. Only nine collections were written by women. By adopting a micro-level analysis of letters written by immigrants and their dear ones who remained

71 of the *Yale French Studies* (1986) dedicated exclusively to the study of personal correspondence, predominantly from a literary angle. Note that the number and quality of works produced by English-speaking scholars did not disappoint either. Consider, for instance, the classic work by Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982); Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); William M. Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter-writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics & the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 2004); Kathleen Anne De Haan, "'He looks like a Yankee in his new suit.' Immigrant Rhetoric: Dutch Immigrant Letters as Forums for Shifting Immigrant Identities," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1998; Ariane Bruneton-Governatori and Bernard Moreux, "Un modèle épistolaire populaire. Les lettres d'émigrés béarnaise," *Par Ecrit. Ethnologie des écritures quotidiennes*, ed. Daniel Fabre (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997) 79-104; anthropologist Sarah Mahler's study, "Transnational Relationships: the Struggle to Communicate across Borders," *Identities* 7.4 (2001) 583-619; and historian Martha Hanna's essay, "A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I," *American Historical Review* 108.5 (Dec. 2003) 1338-1361.

³⁰ Refer to Gerber, "The Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Populism": 3-34. Also by David Gerber: "Ethnic Identification and the Project of Individual Identity: the Life of Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald (1768-1840) of Little Cumbræ Island, Scotland and Auriesville, New York," *Immigrants and Minorities* 17 (July 1998) 1-22; "Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19 (Summer 2000): 3-23; "Theories and Lives: Transnationalism and the Conceptualization of International Migrations to the United States," *IMIS-Beitrag* 15 (2000): 31-53; "Forming a Transnational Narrative: New Perspectives on European Migrations to the United States," *The History Teacher* 35.1 (Nov. 2001): 61-78; "What is it we seek to find in first-person documents? Documenting Society and Cultural Practices in Irish Immigrant Writings," *Reviews in American History* 32 (2004): 305-316; and "Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self-presentation in Personal Correspondence," *Journal of Social History* 39.2 (Winter 2005): 315-330.

behind, Gerber's work assesses the challenges and rewards of analysing personal letters and drawing meaning from them. The objective of the study is to explore how personal relationships were maintained and facilitated through correspondence and "the ways immigrants used letters to achieve that goal."³¹ How personal identities were woven into relationships across distances and how these were manifested in immigrant correspondence is a connecting thread throughout *Authors of their Lives*.

Gerber's book is divided in two parts. The first section explores a number of elements related to the writing and reading of immigrant correspondence. It includes an overview of previous studies that examine letters in migration and an analysis of several dynamics inherent to the content and context of the letters, including parameters associated with the exchange of letters (emotional, literary and social) and the representation of letters (truths, silences, misunderstandings). Next, he examines the multiple means by which letters overcome the physical and emotional spaces that characterized the migration experience. He also explores how the modernization of postal systems was related to the phenomenon of immigration and examines letter-writers' resourcefulness in using the services of the personal couriers. Finally, Gerber also explores issues such as the shared responsibility for sustaining a correspondence and how this dynamic played into the writing process and content of the letters.

In the second part of his study Gerber examines the lives of four immigrants (two men and two women) paying particular attention to the meaning and effect of correspondence in their outlook. Indeed, while "letters cannot speak for themselves," as both Gerber and Fitzpatrick agree, when read carefully through multiple frames, these documents reveal a plethora of human dynamics that shaped long-distance

³¹ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 11

communication in the context of migration. As Gerber suggests, “immigrants cannot be understood exclusively through the study of nation-states, regions, and population cohorts. If we are to have a realistic psychology of immigration, immigrants must be regarded as individuals involved in families and small networks of friends and kin.”³²

The essays in the anthology, *Letters across Borders* (2006) co-edited by historians, Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke were originally presented at the scholarly conference, “Reading the Emigrant Letter: innovative approaches and interpretations” at Carleton University in August 2003. This work offers a number of essays by a multidisciplinary team of scholars on the study of personal letters in migration. While the editors and contributors agree that the challenges of working with the personal letter are many, it is nonetheless a key source that provides “access to the immigrant’s attitudes, values, aspirations, and fears as no other source has the potential to do. The intellectual puzzles presented by the gaps, silences, and textual inadequacies of these letters have added to both the challenges and rewards of using them to explore the worlds of immigrants.”³³

Among the essays from this collection that were particularly relevant to my research is Daiva Markelis’s study on the social importance of correspondence in the lives of Lithuanian immigrants. Specifically, her investigation examines reasons immigrants and loved ones wrote letters to each other, and the characteristics of these letters. As Markelis suggests, the most important reason for writing letters, “one under which the others were

³² Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 228.

³³ Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, Suzanne M. Sinke, “Introduction,” *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, eds. Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke (New York: Palgrave, 2006) 4.

more or less subsumed, was to reaffirm family solidarity.”³⁴ Helen Brown’s study is also important. In her investigation of a two-sided correspondence exchanged between two families in Canada and England during World War Two, Brown examines how the letter-writers negotiated the temporal and spatial distances dividing them, and how the letters themselves “were an important site of identity construction.”³⁵ She shows that the letters were fundamental “to the lived experience of the two families,”³⁶ by suggesting that “Both led double lives: they lived in different countries and in quite different circumstances over several years, but at the same time their lives intersected and overlapped through the letters.”³⁷

While the just-released anthology, *Envoyer et recevoir: Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones* (2006), co-edited by historians, Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis,³⁸ may be regarded as a French-language version of *Letters across Borders*, it is not. Its perspectives on the problems and rewards of studying private letters in a migration context differ in important respects from the work of Elliott, Gerber and Sinke. Among the more relevant contributions in the anthology is Ariane Bruneton-Governatori’s essay on the problems encountered in locating letters and “staying in

³⁴ Daiva Markelis, “‘Every Person Like a Letter’: The Importance of Correspondence in Lithuanian Immigrant Life,” *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, eds. Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke (New York: Palgrave, 2006) 112.

³⁵ Helen Brown, “Negotiating Space, Time, and Identity: The Hutton-Pellett Letters and a British Child’s Wartime Evacuation to Canada,” eds. Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke (New York: Palgrave, 2006) 236.

³⁶ Brown 232.

³⁷ Brown 232.

³⁸ See also the collaborative contribution by Yves Frenette, Bianca Gendreau, Gabriele Scardellato and John Willis, “L’expérience immigrante et la création d’un espace épistolaire: une étude de cas,” *Prendre la route. L’expérience migratoire en Europe et en Amérique du Nord du XIVe au XXe siècle*, eds. Andrée Courtemanche et Martin Paquet (Hull: Vents d’Ouest) 172-193.

touch” with their writers or family archivists.³⁹ Likewise, John Willis’s postal history perspective on immigrant letters and the intersections between public and private spheres offers insights into letter-writing and kin in a context of migration. His hypothesis that “the post served as a means of communication for and between French Canadians situated on both sides of the border,”⁴⁰ is important for the study’s emphasis on the co-relation between kinship and migration. Marcel Martel provides a good discussion on the role of the immigrant letters and relationships. By analysing the correspondence of a French-Canadian family in New England, he brings to light “la diversité de l’expérience émigrante canadienne-française.”⁴¹ Finally, Audrey Pyée’s study on the transnational element in the correspondence written in France by parents concerned about the well-being of their young sons in Manitoba also explores the role of a priest who mediated relations between the parents and their children. In her analysis, she shows how “La migration est donc une expérience accompagnée d’émotions positives et négatives: la sensation d’aventure et les moments de joie et de satisfaction sont assortis de périodes de solitude et de dépression.”⁴² In short, the contributions in this collection, as well as the

³⁹ Ariane Bruneton-Governatori, “L’avènement d’une source privée : lettres et correspondances d’émigrés pyrénéens,” *Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones*, eds. Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis (Québec: les presses de l’Université Laval, 2006) 19-38.

⁴⁰ John Willis, “‘De votre chère soeur qui ne vous oublie jamais’ : A Postal Perspective on French-Canadian Migration in North America,” *Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones*, eds. Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis (Québec: les presses de l’Université Laval, 2006) 78.

⁴¹ Marcel Martel, “‘Gardons contact’: l’expérience épistolaire de Jean-Henri et de Maxime-Ovila Frenière en Nouvelle-Angleterre, 1912-1929,” *Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones*, eds. Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis (Québec: les presses de l’Université Laval, 2006) 194.

⁴² Audrey Pyée, “‘Mon Révérend Père, [...] Je m’inquiète pour mon fils.’ Relations familiales transnationales et épistolaires,” *Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones*, eds. Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel and John Willis (Québec: les presses de l’Université Laval, 2006) 215.

essays included in *Letters across Borders* (2006) clearly demonstrate that the study of letters in migration has not been exhausted. A myriad of approaches, concepts, hypotheses, themes, perspectives, contexts, spaces, timeframes, voices and movements awaits to be unearthed.

B) Sources and Methodology

My research on Italian private correspondence written in the context of the second wave of mass migration to Canada emerges from this historiographical context. The thesis is the first full-length, micro-level study that allows us to explore the multiple and diverse dynamics affecting the personal, familial and transnational experiences of immigrants and their significant others in the homeland. Using an interdisciplinary analysis, I examine the role of gender, family, emotions, agency, myths, nostalgia, separation, and reunion as elements of the migration process. The dissertation also explores the intensity with which migration was experienced by individuals and families on both sides of the ocean, and examines the “making-sense”⁴³ process in which these social actors engaged as they negotiated unfamiliar temporal and spatial realities. The work’s conceptual framework, analytical approach, methods of inquiry and interpretation are grounded in social and migration history and ethnography. Because of its size, the Italy-Canada migration movement is a particularly striking example of the large transatlantic “highway”⁴⁴ that moved people, objects, letters, news, information, and

⁴³ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3-30.

⁴⁴ Personal communication with Bruno Ramirez. August 2006.

networks in the postwar period. Although there are many secondary works that examine Italian migration to Canada in earlier periods of history, no other work with which I am familiar makes such a sustained attempt to penetrate the “wire”⁴⁵ system between Italy and Canada from 1946 to 1971.

The thesis is centered around the original source of private letters that have remained in the possession of families and individuals and that I assembled together in an archive for the purpose of analysis. The letters were written by both the migrants who left and family members and individuals who remained behind. Unlike any other source such as diaries, journals or memoirs, private letters provide a written conversation that was unfolding “in the moment” or as events had just occurred, or were about to occur. Written strictly to meet personal and familial needs, these letters were addressed to trusted loved ones or in some cases, a confidante. Moreover, unlike census data, and personal narratives of public figures, these documents were not intended for analysis, nor for public use. As a result, in order to bring to light the plethora of human experiences, reflections, attitudes and emotions involved in the process of migration revealed in personal correspondence, I first had to locate letters in the private households of Italian immigrants in Canada since no public archive possessed these documents. The archive I created contains more than 800 letters in 18 letter-series that are the primary data source for my analysis. None of the letters was previously part of any archive or institutional collection. I selected six family letter-series comprising over 400 letters for this study.

⁴⁵ The term “wire” is used by Bruno Ramirez as a metaphor in reference to an invisible, yet indelible cable of communication through which emotions, energies, private reflections and confidences of correspondents flowed throughout the intense and frequent epistolary communication across borders. Bruno Ramirez, personal communication. August 2006.

Written in the privacy of rural and urban working-class households in Italy and Canada, the letters are intensely private and were never intended for a public audience, let alone for historical and anthropological analysis. Hand-written, they are often difficult to decipher and frequently contain grammatical errors that reflect differing levels of education and literacy. Yet, the defining thread that links these letters is the social circumstance of their origin, for all were written because of the migration of a loved one from Italy to Canada in the postwar period. Whether written by individuals who had crossed the Atlantic in search of new opportunities, or by family members and lovers who had stayed behind, all of the correspondence was intended to bridge the enormous spatial and temporal distances that separated kin from each other emotionally, socially and physically. The letters are a time capsule through which a plethora of themes, ideas, ideologies, norms, advice, dreams, plans and hopes are articulated in the language of these actors' everyday lives. They mirror the individual writers' interior mental spaces and their views on the outside world, and bring to light the multiplicity and heterogeneity of voices as change and migration was catapulting them to new life possibilities. As Nicole Constable observes in her recent study, *Romance on a Global Stage*, the words and stories of such letter-writers are suggestive of a diversity of aspirations, motivations, and experiences of women and men involved in correspondence relationships within a context of migration. These experiences that are brought to light in my study offer vignettes of the writers' mental universes and are neither typical nor entirely unique.⁴⁶

In the 1940s through to the 1960s, the letter was the single most important, the most popular, and the most affordable source of communication shared between migrants

⁴⁶ Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and 'Mail Order' Marriages* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2003) 14-15.

and loved ones in Italy and Canada. It provided continuity in their relations, and important emotional, social and physical links between kin and lovers despite the enormous distances separating them.

“The letter asserts its claims on its own emotional terms,”⁴⁷ David Gerber suggests in *Authors of their Lives*. Indeed, not only is the letter’s materiality an intimate artefact, the letter, itself, and related elements like the language, the reflections, and the handwriting of absent loved ones, also act as important sites of memory of the relationship between correspondents, and of the absent loved ones. While it was hardly a substitute for an absent loved one, a letter embodied the presence of that person. And, in fact, for these actors, it became the closest approximation to “an intimate conversation.”⁴⁸

Working with letters of a private nature created both opportunities and challenges. Not everyone who wrote letters is represented because not all letters were saved. Those who by necessity or choice did not write letters or chose not to stay in touch, or did not write descriptive letters beyond a few lines to kin and loved ones, are also absent from the analysis. Other problems emerged when reading the letters due to the diversity in handwriting, as well as the wide range of letter-writers, contexts and content (core ideas) of the subject matter discussed in the letters; and their fragmentary nature making linkages among themes often difficult to identify. At the same time, however, the rewards of working with such incredibly revealing and intimate documents are extraordinary. We know much less about the interior worlds of immigrants—as revealed through letters such as these--than of the public world in migration—such as, policies, statistics, and migrant incorporation and communities. As frozen-in-time historical documents, they provide us

⁴⁷ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 2.

⁴⁸ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 2.

with a rare window into the personal, familial, global and in-between lives of actors engaged in the process of migration, specifically in this case, postwar Italy-Canada migration from the viewpoint of women and men, lovers and kin who remained behind in their native villages and from the perspective of migrants themselves.

Initially, when I began this inquiry, some letters became available to me through my personal network of friends and family, individuals whom I knew because they or their parents had migrated to Canada in the postwar period. At the outset, I thought that letters would be fairly easy to find since the time period I was interested in was not part of a very distant past. Whenever I attended any gathering with family and friends, including Christmas parties, weddings and other celebrations, I inquired if private letters of the postwar period remained in the possession of their families. While friends and family were very supportive of my inquiry, few had letters to offer. Many people had not kept the letters after they had first read them, while others had discarded them over time. Still other letters were thrown out by the children of immigrants following the deaths of their parents. One exception was Gianlorenzo Colonello, a family member who had kept his family's correspondence hidden in a small, worn olive-green *valigetta* (luggage) tucked away in the crawl space of his basement.

Having exhausted my own network of kin and acquaintances, I proceeded to contact Montreal's Italian regional and cultural associations to further my inquiry on postwar family letters. At the same time, I contacted former research participants who had previously loaned me their letters for my research for my M.A. thesis (Cancian 1999) on the language of the letters. Eventually, I was invited to speak to members of several Italian cultural groups and described my research project to the Centro Donne di Montreal

(the Italian Women's Center of Montreal), the Centro Donne di Laval (the Italian Women's Center of Laval), the Centro Donne di Madonna di Pompei Church (the Italian Women's Center of Madonna di Pompei Church), the Centro Donne di Notre Dame de Grace (the Italian Women's Center of Notre Dame de Grace), the choir group il Coro Alpino, and finally, the Bocce Club of Kirkland. Although I gave most of these presentations to mixed groups of women and men, women in particular seemed to respond very positively to the project. At every presentation, the response from the audiences was enthusiastic and encouraging. Many expressed pride that the daughter of Italian immigrants, "*una di loro*" ("one of their own"), was interested at a formal, academic level in their stories and experiences as migrants in Canada. Some even wished aloud that their own daughters and sons would take up such an interest and recognize them both as individuals and as a collectivity within Canadian society. Many of the people I encountered regretted having disposed of their letters over the years because they had moved, or lacked space in their homes, or simply had wanted to break with the past. In addition to engaging in field research in the Montreal area, I also travelled to Italy in the summer of 2005. Consistent with the transatlantic process of exchange, field research in Italy initiative allowed me to interview Italian-based family members of correspondents whose letters I had located in Montreal.

In fact, out of the approximately one thousand people I addressed during my initial exploratory fieldwork of locating letters only eighteen letter-collections—in sizes ranging from a handful of letters to over one hundred documents—surfaced. Once I identified "family-archivists" of letters, I organized a meeting with potential participants according to their availability. At these initial meetings, I explained the objectives of my research

and emphasized how important their letters were as historical documents specific to the experience of migration. While these meetings were carried out informally, they were extremely important in helping to foster trust and a friendship between participants and myself. Often these initial meetings, as well as subsequent interviews and conversations, unfolded over *caff  * and *biscotti* (and sometimes lunch) where we discussed personal and family migration experiences and connections with loved ones who remained behind. At the end of these first meetings, participants usually entrusted me with their letters for a few weeks in order for me to photocopy or scan them.

Given the disparities in the size and scope of the collections of letters, however, and the need to create an empirical base adequate to the purposes of analysis and comparison, I decided to focus on six collections, each of which included a minimum of thirty letters and both sides of the correspondence exchanged between Italy and Canada. In all cases the collections included letters that were exchanged over several years and sometimes decades. Taken together, the letters offer a snapshot of the migration experience in the twenty five years immediately following World War Two, from 1946 to 1971. The criteria for establishing these collections were based on several factors. First, by selecting collections of thirty or more letters, I endeavoured to provide a plausible, socio-historical context for the letters, and allow for important insights into subjectivities of different authors and the kinship relations between letter-writers. Similarly, because of their chronological scope, collections of this size enabled a longitudinal analysis of the emotional and personal trajectories experienced by letter-writers over time. As Gerber observes, “if we are to understand immigrant letters, we must begin with individuals and

the significant others with whom they corresponded.”⁴⁹ Second, three of the six letter-series included epistolary dialogues shared between migrants who had recently arrived in Canada and their loved ones in Italy. Through this dynamic, I was able to provide important evidence on the bi-directional flow of communication between kin and lovers in a process of migration. Third, because the letters originated from a variety of locations across Italy and Canada, including small urban centers, agrotowns, agricultural households, and major cities like Rome and Venice in Italy, and resource towns in British Columbia and large cities like Montreal in Canada, they allowed me to examine the multiplicity of locations involved on both sides of the Atlantic ocean. Finally, through the selected letter-series, I was able to show a diversity in relations between correspondents: the exchange of letters between parents, children and siblings, and between married, betrothed and courting couples.

Having established the criteria by which the collections were selected for analysis, I also had to determine a procedure for working with the documents that had been loaned to me. To begin, each letter was scanned. The scanning process helped to materialize the archive by exactly replicating the originals. The scans captured the creases and folds that the documents had acquired over the years, revealed the various shades of black or blue ink in which the letters were generally written, and exposed the color and quality of the paper (often thin, lightweight air mail delivery stock). Once a letter collection was scanned completely and filed according to its date range and the family custodian’s name, the individual files containing the scanned letters were saved on a cd-rom as .PDF files where they could be magnified for easier reading. When all of the technical requirements were completed, I returned the originals to their owners during meetings that invariably

⁴⁹ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 28.

took place in their homes over *caff  *, where it was possible to discuss the context and content of the collection.

Oral interviews were also part of the research. On several occasions, I held formal and informal interviews and conversations with letter-participants and in some cases, with the letter-writers themselves in both Italy and Canada from 2003 to 2007. Not only were oral methodologies key in locating and archiving the letters in the hands of private individuals, they were also important in providing context to the letters and the writers that was not available through the letters themselves. As a result, oral interviews were conducted in Montreal, Toronto, Fernie, B.C. (by telephone) in Canada, and in Rome, Mogliano Veneto, Trieste, Vicenza, Pordenone and Spilimbergo in Italy (specifically, between May and August 2005). Fieldwork research in Italy also enabled me to visit archival centers and gain a firmer grasp on the significance of individuals' private writings as historical documents.

In terms of sustaining relationships with letter-archivists, like many ethnographers engaged in fieldwork research, I endeavoured to stay in touch with participants over time, hoping that the occasional greetings, card, phone call or meeting would help maintain relations between us. Many, if not all participants, seemed to appreciate this effort on my behalf, and frequently offered words of encouragement and pride in my research work-in-progress.

As is often the case with ethnography and other forms of research on living subjects, such as oral history, I was concerned about the effect that my personal relationships with my contacts would have on my scholarship. On the one hand, I was acutely conscious of an obligation to do justice to the richness of the sources and to honour the sense of trust

that had been conferred on me by the decisions to grant me access to the letters in the first place. On the other hand, however, I was equally determined to provide a solid analysis of the letters that was critically motivated and framed in relation to larger theoretical and historiographical constructs. In this context one of the decisions that I took was to preserve the confidentiality of the participating letter-archivists by respecting their anonymity through the creation and use of pseudonyms for the letter-writers.

Designing a database that would allow me to make sense of the material in the letters according to a number of specific themes was the next challenge. While the task of creating a database was particularly demanding because of the range of subject matter found in the correspondence, I was struck by the intensity with which the correspondents spoke about their personal experiences of migration. Specifically, I was impressed with the firsthand voices expressing personal and familial concerns, recounting emotional highs and lows, passing on knowledge and advice about practices and procedures for migration, or expressing gendered and social codes of behaviour. The letters were also remarkable for what they revealed about family and kinship ties, including not only the function of kin in mediating the physical distance between family and friends, but also the extraordinarily intimate communications between lovers separated by time and space.

In order to manage this incredible infusion of voices and information I created a database (using Microsoft Works) that was composed of 37 categories of information, including letter dates, information about the letter-writers and letter-recipients, the relationships between correspondents, the letters' place of origin and destination, the materiality of the letters (ink and paper). In addition, I made a thematic inventory of the letters' contents that focused on specific expressions but which also dealt with larger,

repeated themes such as kinship, gender, emotions, labour, *paesanerìa* (relations between townsfolk) and myths of America.

As I performed the arduous process of reading, deciphering, understanding, and finally analysing the content and context of the letters, I began to focus particularly on the broadly overarching topics of kinship, gender, and emotions which became the central themes in the development of the dissertation, in part because they were so common to the sources. As private forms of expression and communication, the letters provided glimpses into areas of human activity that are often obscured by, or invisible in, more public historical documents and that have seldom been explored in the previous literature on letters and migration.

C) Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One explores the historical context of postwar Italy and Canada as a background for out-migration and immigration for the letter-writers and their families. It also describes the lives of the letter-writers in relation to their migration experiences as immigrants and as kin members who remained in the homeland. Chapters Two, Three, and Four are the core chapters of the dissertation: each situates a particular theme or themes emerging from the correspondence in relation to a larger historiographic and conceptual context. Chapter Two examines the transnational flow of news, objects, and persons and analyses how kinship functioned in migration. Chapter Three focuses on gender relations and the dynamics that emerge from a micro-level analysis of the letters of migrants and loved ones. Specifically, I analyse how gender

roles in the productive and reproductive spheres were reified and reinforced to cope with the disruptions induced by migration. Finally, chapter Four is divided in two sections. The first part examines the emotions that permeate the letters exchanged between parents and children, and explores how families were affected by the prospects of temporary versus permanent migration. The rest of the chapter focuses on the expression of romantic love in letters exchanged between three couples who were separated because of migration. The Conclusion of the thesis summarizes my main arguments and recapitulates the importance of letters to understanding the process of migration.

Chapter One: “Excuse the errors, I’m writing at night by oil lamp...”¹ The Historical Context and the Letter-writers

Carissimo mio fratello e cognata Lucia (My dearest brother and sister-in-law), *I’m answering your cara* (dear) *letter, in which you give me news and advise me that you are healthy. With regards to you, cognata that you are having terrible stomach pains, I agree these troubles are a nuisance. Let’s hope you get better soon... Please excuse the errors, I’m writing at night by oil lamp...*²

Introduction

On the family farm located several kilometres from Ripabottoni’s *piazza* (town square), Carmela Losanto wrote to her family in Montreal by the light of an oil lamp after a long day’s work in the fields. Her words offer a glance into the everyday world of a letter-writer in Italy writing to her kin in Canada. This chapter has two goals. First, it describes the historical context of out-migration from postwar Italy and the political context of immigration to Canada. Second, it identifies the letter-writers whose communications are the subject of this thesis and explores the factors that shaped the social choices made by the families and individuals who participated in the correspondence.

¹ “*Scusatemi lerrore che scriva disera luce petrolio...*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, May 6, 1963. Letter no. 272.

² “*Carissimo mio fratello e cognata Lucia, lo rispondo la tua cara lettera nel sendire i vostri notizie che vitrovato bene di salute ma, ariguardo di voi, cognata vitrovato ammalato lostomaco sono guai le malattie ma speriamo diriguarirvi presto... scusatemi lerrore che scriva disera luce petrolio...*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto and Lucia Valessi, May 6, 1963. Letter no. 272.

A) Postwar Italy and Canadian Immigration Policy

In the days immediately following the announcement of Italy's liberation and the end of the Second World War, some of the recurring images that the newsreels of the time caught were jarringly contradictory. Footage at the Italian national archive, Archivio Luce shows Italians excitedly waving white handkerchiefs in the crowded streets of Milan, Rome, Venice, Naples, juxtaposed to images of the devastating destruction of the cities' buildings or long line-ups of haggard-looking Italians waiting for food rations of flour, soup and bread. Other footage shows Italian soldiers wearily returning home from battle or the concentration camps in contrast to Allied soldiers who were distributing rations of canned meat, chewing gum and cigarettes to villagers of the Mezzogiorno. The violence, disruption and fear resulting from the Second World War had enormous repercussions for the Italian state and its citizens. But the immediate challenge of the postwar period was to reconstruct the nation from the material destruction, and the political and psychological disasters that twenty years of fascist rule had caused.

Most contemporary historians--from Paul Ginsborg to Tony Judt, Anna Maria Torriglia, Patrick McCarthy, Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff--agree that postwar Italy experienced a deep ambivalence.³ After a brief period of national unity, during which all anti-fascist political forces converged and a republican form of government was chosen by referendum, the struggle for the control of the government reached a historical showdown in the first national elections of the newly born republic in

³ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin 1990); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin 2005); Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff, eds. *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture & Society 1948-58* (Oxford and Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1995); Patrick McCarthy, ed. *Italy since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

April 1948. Despite the presence of a myriad of political parties and the complex game of coalitions they generated, the two major contending forces were the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Communists (PCI). Initially under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti (whose long association with imprisoned political theorist, Antonio Gramsci helped sustain the party's association with intellectuals),⁴ the Communist Party looked to the Soviet Union to sustain its commitment to workers' and proletarians' aspirations. The Party was heavily supported by a vigorous national working-class that—especially in the northern regions—had helped to bring down the fascist regime. Meanwhile, with heavy backing from the United States—for which Italy represented a key ally in the mounting Cold War confrontation—the Christian Democrats also had the full support of the Vatican, which did not hesitate to use its influence to convince the electorate about the dangers of communism and atheism, particularly now that women were allowed to vote.

The victory of a DC-led coalition in the 1948 elections ushered in a long succession of Centre-Right governments which—despite the frequent crises and the chronic instability that ensued—would be largely responsible for the political, economic, and social orientations marking the country for the remainder of the Cold War era. Eventually—mostly in the late 1950s and early 1960s—these policies would trigger what most observers have termed “il miracolo economico,” during which rates of growth increased progressively and Italy's economy became competitive with that of other Western European countries.

Yet, the newly-born republic had inherited from the previous regimes a country that was marked by sharp regional inequalities, where poles of industrial development

⁴ Stephen Gundle, “The legacy of the Prison Notebooks: Gramsci, the PCI and Italian Culture in the Cold War Period,” *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture & Society 1948-58*, ed. Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (Oxford and Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1995) 131-148.

coexisted with vast areas of economic stagnation and dire poverty. Italy's industrial sectors, predominantly circumscribed in the triangle of Milan-Turin-Genoa, re-started the engines of production and boosted the employment rate with the aid of the Marshall Plan that was largely funded by the United States. At the same time, southern Italy and parts of the north-east remained mired in poverty and chronic unemployment. A 1954 parliamentary inquiry found that of all the families living under the poverty line, 85 per cent were in Italy's Mezzogiorno, with a southern region such as Calabria exhibiting a per-capita income that was less than one third of some northern regions such as the Piedmont.⁵ Compounding the rampant poverty and misery characterizing postwar Italy was the question of literacy among its people. A regional assembly organized by the Communists in 1949 revealed that in the region of Calabria, "49 per cent of the adult population were illiterate."⁶ As socioeconomic development progressed throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, nation-wide literacy efforts were underway. However, even as late as 1971, according to Italy's national census (ISTAT) 32.4 per cent of the Italian population had no formal schooling, and less than half of the adult population (44.2 per cent) had completed elementary school. As an Italian linguist observes, these ratios "are a sign that over thirty years of democratic life were insufficient to make a serious effort in compensating for the sharp cultural fractures of the country."⁷

Major reform of the agrarian economy (such as facilitating land ownership for the peasantry and favouring the consolidation of an independent farmer's class) was often a

⁵ Ginsborg 122.

⁶ Ginsborg 122.

⁷ "Segno che un trentennio e più di vita democratica non è bastato per avviare un serio risarcimento delle maggiori fratture culturali del paese." My translation. Stefano Gensini, *Elementi di storia linguistica italiana* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1990) 424.

key feature of postwar electoral promises. But little ever came of these reforms other than stopgap measures designed to deal with special, local conditions and resist the powerful landowners lobby.⁸ Consequently, most of the southern regions and several north-eastern provinces continued to exhibit economic stagnation and unemployment well into the 1950s.

As in previous periods of Italy's history, these regions resumed their role as major exporters of labour both for the Italian industrial triangle, and for the economies of Europe, the Americas and Australia. For many struggling Italian men and women, migration became, not an option, but a necessity. As a result of Italy's proximity to Europe, nations such as Germany, Belgium, France and Switzerland became primary targets for thousands of Italian seasonal migrants who returned home at some point during each year to tend to their domestic affairs.

The Sponsorship Program

For others, the dream of "going to America" that had first surfaced in the 19th century was re-activated. Although restrictionist quota laws passed in the 1920s had virtually closed the door to Italian migration to the United States, because of its geographic proximity, Canada quickly became identified as part of "*L'America*." Indeed, the postwar period witnessed the largest movement ever of Italians to Canada.⁹ Migrants

⁸ Ginsborg 129-137.

⁹ Historian Franc Sturino estimates that in the first phase of Italian mass migration to Canada between 1900 and World War I, 119 770 migrants were documented to enter the country. In the years between 1950 and 1970, 514 000 Italians arrived to Canada. Franc Sturino, "Italians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*, ed. Paul Robert Magosci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 789.

and their families who followed originated predominantly from the southern and north-eastern regions of Italy. As historian Franca Iacovetta observes, in some cases, entire clusters of villages or towns in the southern regions were mobilized and linked across the ocean.¹⁰ Facilitated generally by the Government of Canada's Sponsorship program (a family-based migration policy introduced in 1947), a chain migration of single and married men followed by their immediate and extended families began to arrive in postwar Canada.

Not long after the return home of Canadian soldiers overseas followed by thousands of war-brides, Prime Minister Mackenzie King delivered a statement on migration to the House of Commons that would open a window into what Canada was willing to do in the wake of "the world situation as a whole."¹¹ The immediate purpose of Mackenzie King's statement was to define Canada's role in helping to alleviate the global, predominantly Euro-centered problem of a burgeoning number of refugees and displaced persons following the Second World War. As an active member of the United Nations, Canada felt a moral obligation to help Europe's devastated peoples in the immediate short-term, and in fact, over 160 000 displaced persons from the war entered

The number is slightly higher than the figure indicated in the highly cited Italian statistics (440 000) that are based on departing numbers for the period from 1946 to 1976, referred in Luigi Favero and Graziano Tassello, "Cent'anni di emigrazione italiana (1876-1976)," *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana 1876-1976*, ed. Gianfausto Rosoli (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1976) 9-64.

¹⁰ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) 48. See also, Franca Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of Contract Workers...", *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11.1 (Fall 1991): 50-81.

¹¹ William Lyon Mackenzie King, "Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy." House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1947," *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, ed. Howard Palmer (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975) 58.

Canada between 1946 and 1952.¹² At the same time, however, King made certain to emphasize in his statement the benefits of immigration to Canada, observing that migration would serve to increase the country's population, protect its territory and help develop its resources.

The postwar period was a time of enormous economic and population growth. As Kenneth McNaught suggests, "Canada emerged from the war as fourth amongst the world's industrial and trading nations...".¹³ In the 1950s, Canada's economic buoyancy impelled politicians to invest in new infrastructure (roads and electrical power facilities), the building of schools and hospitals, and the Trans-Canada Highway, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Trans-Canada Pipeline among other major projects.¹⁴ Unskilled labour was in high demand in mining and mill towns across the nation, including Michel and Powell River in British Columbia. In cities like Montreal and Toronto, workers were in demand for the construction and road-building industries as well as in the manufacturing and service sectors. Immigration played a key role in ensuring economic progress and national and civic development, with the population and labour flow from Italy proving to be particularly significant.

As King argued, "A larger population will help to develop our resources. By providing a larger number of consumers, in other words a larger domestic market, it will

¹² Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995) 167.

¹³ Kenneth McNaught, *The Pelican History of Canada* (Middlesex and Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969) 272.

¹⁴ Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present*. Second edition (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1998) 385.

reduce the present dependence of Canada on the export of primary products.”¹⁵ All of this would be possible as long as immigration to Canada, mirrored the nation’s “absorptive capacity,” meaning that the number of arriving migrants would “vary from year to year in response to economic conditions.”¹⁶ In what became a historic policy statement, King also stressed that, “Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a ‘fundamental human right’ of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege.”¹⁷ As such, King also assured nativist British- and French-Canadians that, “the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population.”¹⁸ According to historian Robert Harney, in an effort to appease both ordinary Canadians, as well as industrialists at the helm of Canada’s railway, mining and timbering companies, four forces shaped the recruitment choices articulated by King’s statement:

(1) the racialist or cultural assumptions of officials and many politicians, (2) the ethnic lobbies in Canada, (3) the availability of potential migrants of certain nationalities because of wartime and aftermath displacement, and (4) the voracious hunger of Canadian heavy industry for workers who could stand up under strenuous, dangerous and dirty work in remote and unhealthy places.¹⁹

Yet, despite King’s efforts to address the economic needs of Canada, his statement generated its share of protest. The policies it elicited, including the Immigration Act of 1952, were highly debated especially after 1957, when John Diefenbaker’s Conservative

¹⁵ King 60.

¹⁶ King 60.

¹⁷ King 60.

¹⁸ King 61.

¹⁹ Robert F. Harney, “‘So Great a Heritage as Ours’ Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity,” *If One Were to Write a History... Selected Writings by Robert F. Harney*, ed. Pierre Anctil and Bruno Ramirez (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1991) 232.

government moved to stem the tide of immigration from postwar Italy. By 1967, new immigration regulations were enacted, that would change the course of Canadian public policy by focussing on prospective immigrants' skills and education. These regulations would significantly reduce the number of migrants coming from Italy.

King's statement of May 1, 1947 and the ensuing immigration policies that lasted until 1967 offered an important gateway to Italian men and women who were looking for a way out of Italy's postwar economic misery. While thousands still harboured the dream of going to "America," the 1921 and 1924 restrictive quotas imposed by the United States remained firmly in place in the immediate postwar years, thus forcing Italian nationals to rethink the geographies of their dreams. One viable option was the re-activation of kinship networks of Italian migrants who had arrived in Canada during the first wave of mass migration prior to the First World War. Despite the interruption resulting from the Great Depression and the Second World War, the link in chain migration was restarted. Furthermore, the migration of Italian nationals was facilitated by the passage of new immigration policies that widened "the categories for admission of relatives in 1946, 1947, and 1949, since there was an urgent need for this on humanitarian grounds."²⁰ Finally, the classification of Italy as an enemy nation was also lifted in 1950.²¹ As a result of these policy changes, recently admitted landed immigrants and foreign-born Canadian citizens could now sponsor their Italian relatives.

With new immigration regulations in place, thousands upon thousands of Italian men, women and their immediate and extended kin on both sides of the ocean began

²⁰ Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988) 90.

²¹ Alan G. Green, *Immigration and the Postwar Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976) 22-24.

completing applications either for their own migration to Canada, or for that of their loved ones'. The number of applicants was so high that one migration expert has defined the Italy-Canada postwar migration movement as a large transatlantic "highway" of people and networks moving across the Atlantic.²² This movement proved to be decidedly a major episode in Italian migration history. The Sponsorship program had enormous significance for Italian mass migration movement to the point that Italians became the single most important group to benefit from the policy. As Iacovetta observes, over "90 per cent of Canada's postwar Italians were sponsored by relatives. By contrast, the average for all nations was 47 per cent...".²³

While Canada provided economic opportunities for migrating Italians and their families, it is also true that Canadians benefited enormously from the Sponsorship program. As Ramirez suggests, the program,

greatly facilitated the integration of the newcomers into the economy at a minimum social cost; for, much of the burden in gaining access to the labour market was placed squarely with the receiving family or household. In addition, it was the immigrants' own responsibility to learn one of the two official languages if they wanted to exploit the job opportunities open to them; it was their responsibility to find ways of upgrading their skills; it was their problem to look after themselves in case of work accidents or unemployment.²⁴

And, while the Italian migrants busily adjusted to their new lives in Canada, the sponsoring immigrant families or households functioned –at least for the initial period of

²² Bruno Ramirez, personal communication. August 2006.

²³ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* 48.

²⁴ Bruno Ramirez, "Canada's Immigration and Policy-making of the 19th and 20th Centuries: From Empire to Globalisation," published as "La immigration y la politica inmigratoria en Canada en los siglos XIX y XX: del imperio a la globalizacion," *Estudios migratorios latinoamericanos* 18 (Abril 2004): 43-74. Unpublished English manuscript p. 21.

settlement--as both a unit of service and reproduction, not to mention as shock absorbers for other migrant workers, their spouses and children.²⁵

B) The Letter-writers

Like millions of other Italians, the letter-writers featured in this thesis had their lives transformed by migration, whether by necessity or choice, whether as individuals leaving or staying behind. The following section identifies the letter-writers who are the focus of this study and describes their life experiences in relation to migration to Canada. In doing so, it explores the factors that influenced the choices made by the letter-writers and their families.

One letter-writer was thirty-two year old, Sara Franceschetti who lived in a multiple-family agricultural household in the outskirts of Arcugnano, Vicenza (in the Veneto region) with her two children, Paolo and Elisabetta. Her husband, Dante del Moro had just emigrated to join his cousin Elio Santini who had previously emigrated to Powell River, British Columbia immediately after the First World War. Prior to his arrival in Canada in March 1956, Dante had been an agricultural worker on the family farm jointly owned and administered with his brothers. While this departure for Canada was his first experience of migration, he was already familiar with being away from home, as he had been stationed on the Russian Front during the Second World War. In his first nine months in Canada, Dante lived with his cousin and his family in Powell River's town site—immediately outside the gates of the pulp and paper and sawmill. In this period, Dante worked first as a cement worker and mason with a co-villager, and soon after,

²⁵ Ramirez, "Canada's Immigration and Policy-making". Unpublished manuscript p. 21.

became employed with the Powell River Company as a labourer. He was also busy looking for suitable housing for his family who were to join him soon, and finally settled on a house located within walking distance to the mill, with a backyard facing the Pacific ocean's shoreline.

Prior to migrating to Canada in the spring of 1956, Dante had made arrangements with his brothers to provide for Sara and the two children in his absence. In addition to these shared living arrangements, Sara, the youngest of the women married to a Del Moro, was also expected to do many of the household chores in the family unit. Once her husband had left for Canada, her part-time work in her family's business ceased and she dedicated herself to taking care of her children, five-year old Paolo and two-year old Elisabetta. In her letters to Dante—which date from March to November 1956--Sara frequently described some of the economic hardships she experienced and her struggles to make do. At the same time, however, she was acutely conscious of the social pressure to nurture her image as a well-kept migrant's wife. As she wrote in the summer of 1956, "as you know, I am being watched more carefully than before, this means that if I dress well, you are earning good money, if not, it means you're struggling ... you know how our world is, appearances mean everything."²⁶ When her husband sent her \$5.00 for their wedding anniversary, she replied about how important it was that she and the children appear well-dressed to the townsfolk. In her letters to Dante, Sara sporadically made reference to tensions in the household. However, when she did mention them, she did so in relation to his family's desire to purchase various household items she would have left behind, or to complain about the food and wine rations that were agreed upon between

²⁶ "*perché come sai sono guardata più di prima adesso, verrebbe a dire che se sono elegante tu guadagni, senò sei messo male ... sai come il nostro mondo, vuol vedere le apparenze.*" Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, n.d. estimated summer 1956. Letter no. 98.

Dante and his brothers before his departure. Another source of tension described by Sara entailed not receiving the necessary monies she needed from her brothers-in-law for the daily subsistence of their children, as had also been agreed upon prior to Dante's departure. As a result of these difficulties, Sara urged Dante to write to his brothers in Arcugnano—with whom she shared the household—in order to resolve the issues for her. What is also clear is that her relationship with her sister and brother-in-law, who lived just a short distance away and who were considered of a higher social standing, was paramount to her daily survival. From her letters to Dante, we learn of Luca Branchetti and Silvia Franceschetti's support and care for Sara and her children. There is mention also of frequent visits to their home, of their lending money to her, and providing support and solace including accompanying her to Rome to get her visa for Canada. While his father was working in Powell River, Paolo attended elementary school administered by the nuns, and his sister attended a children's nursery nearby. According to Paolo, both children dreamed of joining their father in this faraway place called Canada.²⁷

A second letter-writer who features prominently in this thesis is Daniela Perini, who, along with her sons Davide and Fabio, faithfully wrote to her daughter Maddalena Franchi, a recent bride who had left to join her husband in Montreal in November 1960. As a young woman, Maddalena had attended the Collegio delle Suore (a school run by nuns) until she was 18 years old. Two years of working as a hairdressing assistant followed work in the local service industry. Her father had died when she was still a child, but she and her mother and brothers continued to live in the family home in the city center of Ascoli Piceno, located at the southern tip of the Marche region. For Daniela, the

²⁷ Oral interviews and personal communication with Paolo del Moro, August 2004, May 2006 and August 2007.

most important thing for her daughter was to get married. When a cousin of Maddalena's introduced her to Giuseppe Martino, a young man from Canada, Maddalena accepted his courtship and married him two weeks later, on the eve of his departure for Canada. Shortly after, Maddalena joined him in Montreal. According to her brother, there was another young man in Ascoli courting Maddalena (and who later, became financially successful in Ascoli). Yet, at the time the best prospect for Maddalena was this "Americano" from Canada, the country whose streets, it was thought, were paved with gold. And so, Maddalena's mother accepted her daughter's departure despite the emotional loss she would experience. Maddalena had been her mother's closest confidant and while her migration left an enormous void in her mother's heart, she firmly believed that this was the best decision for her daughter. To help cope with the emotional emptiness experienced by herself and her daughter, Daniela and Maddalena wrote frequently to each other.²⁸

Their correspondence began in November 1960 and continued until September 1988 when Maddalena was joined in Canada by her brother Fabio and her mother Daniela, leaving behind Davide with his young family in Rome. In 1961, widowed Daniela Perini had been living with one of her sons in a small apartment in Ascoli. However, despite the company of nearby friends and kin in her apartment building, and her son working nearby, the departure of her daughter left an emptiness in Daniela's life. Her eldest son, Davide was living in Rome and employed with the city's police force. Not long after Maddalena's departure, Fabio was drafted into the military for one year of mandatory service, which he served in various posts in northern Italy. It was the void created by her

²⁸ Oral interviews with Maddalena Franchi, June, August and November 2003. Oral interview with Davide Franchi and Angela Sordi, June 2005.

daughter's departure for Canada, however, that seemed to cause Daniela her greatest sense of loneliness. This was only partly offset by the daily visits to friends in her apartment building and to kin nearby, whether to reminisce about Maddalena or watch television together in the evenings.

A third letter letter-writer immersed in the struggles of postwar Italy was a lively blue-eyed woman named Carmela Losanto. For generations, she and her family had lived in the town of Ripabottoni, Campobasso—a region that contributed enormously to the migration movement to Canada, and especially, Montreal, both before and after World War Two. In fact, both of Carmela's brothers and her husband had emigrated to Canada at various intervals in the postwar years. The archived correspondence of Carmela Losanto dates from March 28, 1958 to October 6, 1972, and is addressed primarily to her sister-in-law, Lucia Valessi and her brother, Domenico Losanto. The letters describe her responsibilities as a mother of two sons whose father had migrated to Canada immediately after the end of the Second World War. Throughout this period, we learn of Carmela Losanto's long days of work with rudimentary farming tools in the parched fields of the Molisan hills and of her commitment to oversee the renovations of her brother's home adjacent to the house she shared with her in-laws on the main *piazza* (square) of Ripabottoni.

With enough determination and hard work, Carmela and her in-laws' family managed yearly to yield some good crops of wheat, corn, figs, tomatoes and other staples from the impoverished lands of Molise²⁹ until her migration to Canada in 1967. With her

²⁹ The farm fields of the Molise region have been described as, "durement marquée: déboisement, faible amélioration des sols, vastes surfaces soumises aux éboulis..." Bruno Ramirez, *Les premiers Italiens de Montréal: L'origine de la Petite Italie du Québec* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984) 26.

departure for Montreal came a break from this hard agricultural life. Nonetheless, the decision to permanently leave her hometown entailed personal dilemmas, some of which she confided to her sister-in-law upon receiving her visa for Canada:

My head is heavy. I don't know if what I'm doing is good or bad. How much I'd like to talk with you, but on paper I can't say everything. I'm sorry to leave my home and other things, but the world is made for travelling... with God willing, I too will come to America, but now I feel sad and have little desire to leave, as the old proverbs say, my *paese nativo* (native hometown)...³⁰

Despite hesitation, however, Carmela nonetheless made the leap and with her adolescent sons arrived in Montreal in the summer of 1967.

During her years in Ripabottoni, Carmela had been subjected to enormous kinship pressures primarily as a result of her in-laws' strict codes of behaviour and high expectations. Unlike the majority of *affittuari* (land tenants) in Ripabottoni, they owned several hectares of land--and yet, they lived under marginal economic conditions, as Anita Losanto recalls her aunt telling her. As the youngest daughter-in-law in the family, and because her husband was away, Carmela was expected to follow the orders and dictates of her husband's family, including her older sister-in-law. While Carmela spent long hours during the planting and harvest seasons working on the farm, which was located several kilometres away from the town and which did not have electricity, she nonetheless managed to write frequently to her family in Canada. Reaching out to them must have been an enormous source of comfort in coping with the disciplining glances of her in-laws. Her brother and sister-in-law in Montreal—who had migrated to Canada in

³⁰ “*stono con una testa pesante non saccio se faccio bene hò pure male quando tivolesse parlare ma sopra la carta non posso parlare tutto, ma fà dolendo alasciare la mia casa e altre cose ma il mondo è fatto dagirare ... se i Dio vuole verò anche io nell'America, ma ora mi sento triste e tanto volondà non tengo di lasciare qui come sidice il proverbio penzando il mio paese nativo... .*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto and Lucia Valessi, January 14, 1967. Letter no. 299.

1957 following the departure of their eldest son in 1953--were sensitive to her efforts to oversee their home's renovations in their absence, and frequently thanked her, as we can infer from Carmela's letters to them. Carmela, however, was more than pleased to help because she wanted to sustain their bonds of affection and support. Despite her desire to be reunited with her family--"my heart longs to be near all of you"³¹--her letters show that physical distance did not impede the offer of genuine support and care between kin.³²

The fourth set of letters are those of a young single man writing in postwar Rome to his sweetheart in Montreal. These also show that migration and the separation that came with it was no obstacle to love. The epistolary love story of Giordano Rossini and Ester di Leonardi began on March 10, 1957, just one day after Ester boarded the steamship liner heading for Halifax. The correspondence ended with Giordano's letter of August 18, 1960. From the first letters, we learn that Giordano was a young man in his early 20s who lived with his *nonna* (grandmother) in Ostia, but was employed in a *negozio* (store) in the centre of working-class Rome. His mother had died when he was very young, and his father had been absent for much of his life. The letters describe the infrequent presence of his father and the ambivalent relationship the two shared. Giordano's immediate circle of support included his two best friends, a female cousin of Ester's, and his extended family of aunts and uncles, as well as Ester's aunt and uncle--most of whom had approved of his relationship with Ester. In the letters written by Giordano Rossini, we learn of his *passeggiate* (walks), his dreams, his ardent desire to be near Ester, his emotional highs and lows at missing her, his relationship with his grandmother, his personal struggles, his

³¹ "il mio cuore si volesse trovare vicino a voi tutti." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto and Lucia Valessi, August 16, 1963. Letter no. 277.

³² Oral interviews and conversations with Anita Losanto, July and August 2003, June and August 2007.

economic difficulties and his hopes for better employment, which in turn, would impel his sweetheart to return and finally marry him. Unlike in the other letter-series, however, there is no mention of a desire on his behalf to join Ester in Montreal. Instead, his hopes focused on her return to Rome, after which they would marry and live happily ever after.

Ester di Leonardi had left for Canada in March 1957 with her sister and brothers, to join her brother and uncle in Montreal. No sooner had Ester arrived than she, along with her sister, became gainfully employed in Montreal's clothing industry. From Giordano's responses to Ester, we also learn that her brothers disapproved of the relationship she and Giordano maintained by correspondence, resulting in frequent heated discussions in her household. These dynamics, which we can assume were described in Ester's letters to him, caused Giordano to worry about losing Ester, to wonder who was opening her mail, and whether she was receiving all of his letters.³³

Love and migration also figure in the fifth set of letters exchanged by two sweethearts between Montreal and Venice in 1948-1949. Prior to her departure in September 1948, Clara Montorio had already been corresponding with her beloved Maurizio who hailed from her hometown Cortina d'Ampezzo. As it became increasingly clear in 1946 that Clara and her mother would join her father in Montreal immediately after the war, Maurizio wrote to both her mother in Cortina d'Ampezzo and to her father in Montreal asking for their daughter's hand in marriage. Upon receiving a positive reply, Maurizio and Clara convinced themselves that the distance that was about to separate them would in no way impede their relationship or commitment to each other. In fact, in

³³ Oral interviews and conversations with Marco Colledani, March 2003 and Irene Motta, January 2007.

less than one year after Clara's arrival in Montreal, Maurizio had joined her, and within 30 days the couple was married in the city's Italian church, Madonna della Difesa.³⁴

A second set of letters from the same collection, which begins in 1963 and ends in 1982, entails a different cast of authors, namely the parents and siblings of Maurizio who remained in Italy. In 1962, Maurizio and Clara had returned to Italy with their two young daughters to start a new life in Italy and take advantage of the work opportunities that materialized because of the country's "miracolo economico." They proceeded to live in Mestre, a short distance away from Maurizio's family. In the summer of 1963, when Maurizio's job required him and his family to move to Milan, Maurizio and Clara decided to return to Canada, and resume their lives in Montreal alongside Clara's parents. Both Clara and Maurizio and their daughters would subsequently return to Italy for brief visits home.³⁵

Finally, the sixth letter-series takes place in a town only a few hours away from Venice. Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica were also keeping correspondence with their loved one in Canada. Their son, Gianlorenzo, had first migrated to Michel, British Columbia at the encouragement of his aunt, leaving behind his native town of Spilimbergo that is located on the west side of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. The correspondence between son and parents dates from 1951 to 1986 and begins with a postcard written by Gianlorenzo Colonello while onboard the S.S. Argentina in December 1951 on his way to Halifax. However, the volume of letters back and forth intensified in

³⁴The Church Madonna della Difesa was erected in 1911 and it was the first Italian church to be built in large part as a result of the generosity of the Italian community in Montreal. For further details on the founding of the Church Madonna della Difesa in Montreal's Mile End, refer to Ramirez, *Les premiers Italiens* (1984) and Guglielmo Vangelisti, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (Montreal: 1956).

³⁵ Oral interviews and conversations with Maurizio Trevisan and Clara Montorio, June 2003, February 2004, April 2004 and April 2007.

June 1954 when Gianlorenzo was in the process of making arrangements for his move from Michel to Montreal.

In their rural-based, working-class household in Spilimbergo, several generations of the Colonello and Domenica families lived together and shared responsibilities.

Gianlorenzo's father was a day labourer; however, the job market offered few work possibilities, and as a result, he devoted his hours to working as an *affittuario* (land tenant) in the farm fields nearby. While the farm labour of both husband and wife yielded some good harvests, the agricultural economy was precarious and the land was "relativement pauvre, tournée principalement vers la production de produits alimentaires à des fins de consommation..."³⁶

The memory of his mother waving her white handkerchief as the steamship liner moved away from the docks of Genoa was a recurring image that Gianlorenzo preserved in his mind as he departed for British Columbia, where his paternal aunt and her husband awaited him. When his aunt had visited him in Spilimbergo in 1950 and witnessed the economic difficulties that her family was facing she had suggested that Gianlorenzo join her and her family in Michel where steady, well-paying jobs were available. Gianlorenzo remembers being paid \$2.00 per hour (equivalent of 1 500 lire per hour) in the coke ovens of Michel's mines. This was in sharp contrast to the rare work opportunities that were available in Spilimbergo, the most lucrative of which paid 1000 lire per day. Once Gianlorenzo agreed to join his aunt and uncle in Canada, she then proceeded to complete the papers for the "atto di richiamo" (the application for sponsoring a relative as a result of the Sponsorship program), and Gianlorenzo was soon on his way to Michel. As the

³⁶ Mauro Peressini, *Migration, Famille et Communauté: Les Italiens du Frioul à Montréal 1945-1980* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1990) 45.

only male offspring of the family, Gianlorenzo needed good earnings to repay his debt for the transportation to Canada, send savings home to his family in Spilimbergo, and pay his living expenses for rent and food to his aunt of approximately \$100.00 per month. The money Gianlorenzo sent home to his parents was indispensable to their economic well-being as without it, they would have had serious trouble to survive the local economy. In the years following Gianlorenzo's migration, his father, Luciano, developed significant eye problems that would eventually lead to blindness and which prevented him from earning an income as an *affittuario*. However, Gianlorenzo purchased a house for his parents to live in rent-free for the rest of their lives. Gianlorenzo's sister had also emigrated to Canada and lived with her brother for a few years until she returned home to marry in September 1961 and remained in Italy thereafter.

Eventually, after working for a few years in the dust-infested, back-breaking labour of the coke ovens and mines of the Crowsnest Pass, Gianlorenzo decided in the summer of 1954 to sell his car and other personal belongings and move to Montreal where he lived in a boarding house with other townsfolk. Motivated by the prospect of finding a well-paying job more suited to his technical training as *muratore* (mason), Gianlorenzo was encouraged to move east by his paternal uncle who had arrived in Montreal in 1953. One evening in 1958, through the match-making skills of his sister—who had joined him in 1957--Gianlorenzo met Elsa Contini, whom he married on July 25, 1959 at the Madonna della Difesa Church in Montreal's Little Italy. Finally, in September 1961, Gianlorenzo, accompanied by his young wife Elsa, returned home to Italy for a visit after his ten-year absence.³⁷

³⁷ Oral interviews and conversations with Gianlorenzo Colonello and Elsa Contini, December 2004, November 2005, December 2006, and January 2007.

In addition to revealing the letter-writers' motivations for out-migration and the emotional connection that was maintained through the correspondence between lovers and kin, the letters that I examine in this thesis also provide important insights into the materialization of public policy in the lives and life choices of ordinary people. A number of letters in the collection show how the Sponsorship program enabled chain migration and influenced the life choices made by ordinary individuals. For instance, letters exchanged between two lovers in early 1948 show an Italian immigrant woman's awareness of the new Canadian legislation that would enable the migration of her fiancé. In a letter Clara Montorio advised Maurizio Trevisan that: "now they have issued another law, which allows a fiancée to sponsor her fiancé provided the couple marry within 30 days of the man's arrival in Canada... ." ³⁸

How migration procedures were experienced personally by individual women and men hoping to migrate to Canada is demonstrated through a letter of Sara Franceschetti, which offers a rare glimpse into the first-hand experience of a hopeful female migrant interviewed by immigration officers at the Canadian visa office in Rome. In this exceptional document—which is discussed more fully in chapter three from a gender perspective—we read about the trials that Sara experienced as she answered the immigration officer's inquisitive questions. Later in the same correspondence we also read about the sense of relief that came when her passport was finally being stamped with

³⁸ *"ora hanno emanato un'altra legge, la fidanzata può chiamare il fidanzato perché lo sposalizio avvenga prima dei 30 giorni che l'uomo risiede nel Canada..."* Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 14, 1948. Letter no. 306. The letter-writer is referring to an immigration regulation that was recently in effect at the time and that provided conditions upon which a fiancé or fiancée would be sponsored for immigrating to Canada. One of these conditions stipulated that the legal union of a couple take place in marriage within a short period of time.

the required visa that would allow her and her children to join her husband in Powell River. In fact, in a letter of September 27, 1956, Sara wrote to her husband and advised him that all went well at the Canadian embassy and that she would now proceed to booking the departure for her and the children. Here is Sara's description of her experience at the embassy:

I was required to speak to someone else, since there are three of them who sign the visa, this one was more picky than the others, he wanted to know every single detail, and I answered his questions nonetheless. However, I was scared out of my wits. Altogether, even this one went well. I can't tell you what a sigh of relief I breathed, *caro...* ³⁹

Indeed, enormous relief was sighed by many thousands of prospective migrants who passed the interview at the visa office and left the premises with their highly-sought visa just issued. These individuals could now book their tickets on the S.S. Saturnia, the S.S. Argentina, the S.S. Homeric, and other steamship liners charting their courses for Halifax.

The impact of the Sponsorship Program on kin obligations and support is also crystallized by many of the letters. For instance, one letter in September 1955 written by a cousin of prospective immigrant Dante del Moro explained what the Sponsorship Program required of sponsors and prospective migrants, and what that meant for both parties on a personal level. In this letter, the response of future sponsor Elio Santini to his Italian cousin's inquiry about migrating to Canada and joining him in Powell River is brought to light. His words of encouragement serve as an important insight into the kind of support kin promised and realized in the process of chain migration across borders. In this document, Elio advised Dante that:

³⁹ *"sono stata destinata ha un altro siccome ce ne sono tre che firmano il visto questo era più pignolo ha voluto sapere (morte e miracoli) di tutto, io indifferentemente gli rispondevo, avevo una fifa ma insomma è andata bene anche questa. Ti dico che ho messo un sospiro di sollievo caro...."* Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 27, 1956. Letter no. 84.

Caro cugino (Dear cousin), I have read and reread your letter, and it feels like a dream that you too are thinking of coming to these lands. I want to tell you that I delayed writing to you because I needed some more information, but in the end, ... the information I received is that you need to write a letter *ben scritta* (well-written) to the Canadian Consulat in Rome, stating my name and address of where I live... you can tell them that I assume full responsibility of you upon entering Canada...then once here, you can call your brothers or sisters over, I hope you can come. The advice I have for you is that you come alone,... when you will see what life is like in these lands and if you like it, then you can call your wife and children, and even another of your brothers... Regarding the money... will follow.⁴⁰

The support Dante del Moro received in Canada from his kin was clear in the letter he wrote to his wife Sara just one day after arriving in Vancouver. In this first letter home—a letter which is also discussed in chapter two—he described in detail the abundance of food, comfort and job possibilities that welcomed him thanks to the generosity of his godmother in Vancouver and his cousin in Powell River. Clearly impressed over the welcome by his kin and his new country, he wrote:

At the station, I found who was waiting for me, someone I was not expecting, my *santola* (godmother) Lidia Prusani. And, I must tell you, *cara moglie* (dear wife), that I have no words to describe my joy... She took me out, got into a car, and there we were heading to the ferry boat station. In ten minutes we were home. Here, I can't begin to tell you the kind of welcome that awaited me. It was as if I were the president of Vancouver. There was everything and anything imaginable to eat, all to my heart's content. Then, she took me to visit her brother Marco at the Hotel, and there too, what a welcome! Then, she took me to visit some Italian friends at their home. We did some groceries until supertime, and then, once again, we went out. Imagine that they had already found a job for me... Last night, we immediately called Elio on the telephone which he has at home, and as soon as he heard my

⁴⁰ “*Caro cugino, o letto e riletto la tua lettera mi sembrava un sogno che pure tu pensi di venire in questi paesi. Voglio dirti tardai di scriverti per il motivo che o voluto informazioni ma infine..., il solo che ebi in esito e che tu scrivi una lettera ben scritta al Consolato Canadese in Roma, dandoli il nome e indirizzo di ove io mi trovo... puoi dirli che io mi prendo la piena responsabilità di te una volta entrato in Canada...poi una volta qui, poi tu puoi fare venire li altri fratelli o sorelle, auguro che puoi venire, però il consilio che io ti do, e di venire da solo, ... cuando tu vedrai come e la vita in questi paesi se ti sembra che ti piace, farai poi venire la moglie fili ed anche unaltro fratello... Riguardo il denaro... in seguito.*” Letter from Elio Santini to Dante del Moro, September 4, 1955. Letter no. 129.

voice, he didn't know whether to laugh, or cry. For now, we said 'hello' and arranged a meeting. He's expecting me on Sunday night. I wanted to head that way earlier, but my *santola* would not let me go at any cost, because, as she said, 'you're tired, first rest and then you'll go up.' Perhaps, that was best, since I needed to get some rest. Imagine that *la santola* missed two days of work, as she waited for me. We were supposed to arrive on Wednesday this week, but there were some train delays, and we lost a day. Now, as I write to you, I'm at Lidia's house. She went to work, and I'm here alone. I just prepared for myself a nice morning snack, fried eggs with butter, with strawberries in a syrup, pastries, and so much more. I tell you this, never before in my life have I found myself in these circumstances. Last night, Elio called, and confirmed that he'll be home next week, and as far as I know, I'll be starting work...⁴¹

⁴¹ "alla stazione ho trovato che mi aspettava, chi meno mi aspettavo, mia santola Lidia Prusani, e non ho parole, cara moglie, per dirti quanta è stata la mia gioia... mi ha portato fuori, ha preso una macchina e via alla stazione del ferri boat dieci minuti e si era ha casa sua. Qui non ti dico che accoglienza meglio che non fossi il presidente di Vancouver, da mangiare, di ogni colore a volontà. Poi mi ha portato da suo fratello Marco all'Hotel e lì altrettanto, poi in casa di amici suoi Italiani, dopo fuori a fare spesa e così fino a ora di cena, e dopo fuori ancora, e pensa che loro mi avevano già trovato lavoro... Ieri sera subito hanno chiamato Elio al telefono, che lui lo ha in casa, e appena ha sentito la mia voce non sapeva se ridere, ho piangere, così intanto, ci siamo salutati e dati appuntamento, lui mi aspetta Domenica sera. Io volevo andar su prima mà qui la santola non mi ha lasciato a tutti costi, perché sei stanco, prima ti riposi bene, e poi vai su, e forse è stato meglio, ne avevo bisogno. Pensa che la santola ha perso due giorni di lavoro, per venirmi ad aspettare, e in effetti si doveva arrivare mercoledì s.c. ma causa i ritardi del treno, abbiamo perso un giorno. Ora che ti scrivo sono in casa di Lidia, lei è andata al lavoro, ed io sono in casa da solo, mi son fatto una buona merenda, uova all'occhio e burro, poi fragole al sciroppo, paste e non ti dico altro, solo una cosa che in vita mia forse è la prima volta che mi trovo ha questo punto. Ieri sera Elio mi ha detto che la settimana prossima sta a casa, e ha quanto ho capito, forse lunedì comincio il lavoro... ." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, March 23, 1956. Letter no. 157.

Chapter Two: "... Even though distance has now kept us apart..."¹

Kinship across Networks

If it wasn't convenient for you where you worked before in the coke ovens, you did well to change jobs. Besides, the job wasn't even healthy. I only tell you, hold on to your money, and make something of it now that you are young. Don't go after cars, and don't get sick while you are away in a foreign land. It's always good to have some money in your pocket, don't you think so? Because as you surely remember, when you left, you said that you were going away per farti qualche cosa per te (to make something of yourself), but instead, if you go after cars and other things, you'll get nothing out of it, not even for yourself... .²

Introduction

In the article, "The Traffic in Women,"³ feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin argues that "the exchange of goods and services, production and distribution, hostility and solidarity, ritual and ceremony, all take place within the organizational structure of kinship."⁴ Rubin also observes that through kinship concrete forms of sex/gender systems

¹ "... la lontananza ci asepato..." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, May 24, 1963. Letter no. 273.

² "Se non ti conferiva in dove eri nei forni ai fatto bene a cambiare che con di più non era lavoro tanto salutario. Solo ti dico tieni da conto i soldi di farti qualche cosa adesso che sei giovine e di non andar dietro machine, e poi anche ad a malarsi ed essere fuori all'estero in terra straniera e sempre bello ad avere i soldi in tasca non ti pare? Perché ti ricordi bene che quando sei partito ai detto che vai via per farti qualche cosa per te, ma invece se vai dietro vetture e altre cose, non combini niente nemmeno per te?..." Letter from Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 18, 1954. Letter no. 20.

³ Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 157-210.

⁴ Rubin 170.

are made up, reproduced and reinforced, and that kinship systems have their “own relations of production, distribution, and exchange, which include certain ‘property’ forms in people.”⁵

This chapter examines the “traffic” of kin in migration through an analysis of the personal correspondence that flowed between six kin networks in postwar Italy and Canada. My analysis charts the prismatic movements of kin within networks engaged in a process of migration from the perspective of eleven letter-writers. It explores the daily concerns, overarching themes and ongoing dynamics that affected the members of these networks. The chapter has three main axes of discussion. First, it examines the flow of words, objects and persons to kin across borders, including dynamics related to the transportation of these items via “personal courier.”⁶ Second, it looks at kinship in its supportive role of those who migrated. Finally, it explores how kinship’s controlling function served to remind kin of their obligations and duties toward family members near or far. Through these three axes, I show how the practices of kinship identified in the letters reinforced bonds of cohesion within their networks despite separation. A brief discussion on the salience of kinship in the lives of Italian migrants and their loved ones concludes the chapter.

Historiographically, the examination of kinship in relation to migration has produced several significant works since the 1980s. The study of Tamara Hareven,

⁵ Rubin 177.

⁶ The term, “personal courier,” is borrowed from Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* (2006) and means “traveling friends and willing passersby who were headed toward the right destination.” (p. 146). In my analysis, the expression also includes kin and acquaintances of migrants and loved ones in both sending and receiving societies who delivered in person their letters, objects and/or greetings because they were headed toward the same or close to the personal courier’s original destination.

Family Time & Industrial Time (1982),⁷ for instance, has been instrumental in shedding light on the dynamics of change in family and kinship inside a context of migration and work. Her inquiry revolves around the question of how French-Canadian families effected change in the factories, as opposed to how families were affected by the change in the organization of work. In other words, Hareven's focus is on the agency that French-Canadian families exercised while working in the Amoskeag Mills in Manchester, New Hampshire, and how these families, including extended kin and their individual members, benefited or not, from changes in the factory and in the home. Hareven's study has been instrumental in helping historians to become aware of the distinctions and inter-relationships between "family time," "individual time," and "industrial time." They also became attuned to how kin functioned as a key resource for new migrants.

When we consider specifically Italian kinship and migration, the ethnographic study of Micaela di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class and Gender among California Italian-Americans* (1984) is significant both methodologically and empirically. This anthropological study examines the interlocking relationships between ethnicity, economy, kinship, and gender and the changes that occur over time.⁸ Through case-studies of five Italian-American families living in Northern California, Di Leonardo documents the diversity of class, gender, and kinship relations that developed within Italian-American households in the United States, and links it to the nature of their roles and insertion in the local economies of the regions in which they settled. The work of medical anthropologist, Colleen Leahy Johnson, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Italian*

⁷ Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time & Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 4.

⁸ Micaela Di Leonardo, *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender among California Italian-Americans* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984) 12.

American Families (1985) has been especially useful in pointing to specific behavioural dynamics of Italian families engaged in a process of acculturation and incorporation.⁹ Johnson explores Italian Americans' ethnic group membership in a northeastern city in the United States, as it manifested itself in family organization.¹⁰ More specifically, the study examines the capability of Italian families to generate their own internal support system, as revealed through their value system, their norms regulating interaction, their family roles, the socialization of the young, the intergenerational relationships, and the ethnic characteristics in the social interactions between the networks.¹¹

The early 1980s also witnessed the production of another important contribution to the scholarship on Italian kinship and migration. Through participant observation and interviews with several families in a small Calabrian community near Cosenza, anthropologist Fortunata Piselli investigated change and continuity within households and families affected by the migration of their kin in the 1950s and 1960s. In this study, Piselli argues that, "the penetration of market factors through emigration did not involve the removal or dilution of traditional relations. Yet, it created lifestyle conditions that tended to perpetuate them in other forms as key elements of cohesion and stability in the social system."¹² While Piselli focuses on a Calabrian community affected by the out-

⁹ Colleen Leahy Johnson, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Italian-American Families* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985). While Johnson's study does not examine Italian families and kinship engaged in a process of migration, it nonetheless, examines family life of first- and second-generation Italian-American families.

¹⁰ Johnson ix.

¹¹ Johnson 11.

¹² "la penetrazione dei meccanismi di mercato, tramite l'emigrazione, non solo non provoca la scomparsa o l'indebolimento delle relazioni tradizionali, ma crea condizioni di vita che tendono a perpetuarle, sotto forme diverse, come fattore principale di coesione e stabilità nel sistema sociale." (my translation) Fortunata Piselli. *Parentela ed Emigrazione. Mutamenti e continuità in una comunità calabrese*. (Torino: Einaudi, 1981) 5.

migration of its co-villagers, she shows the extent to which relations between kin changed as a result of an emerging socioeconomic emphasis on the individual as opposed to more communal forms of cohesion among kin.

In response to the British historian Frank Thistlethwaite's invitation, delivered in 1960, to explore "from neither the continent of origin nor from the principal country of reception; ... to think neither of emigrants nor immigrants, but of migrants, and to treat the process of migration as a complete sequence of experiences whereby the individual moves from one social identity to another,"¹³ a number of migration historians have produced significant works that documented the transnational dimension of migration. Much of Canadian historian, Robert F. Harney's scholarly production of the mid-1970s onwards examines a continuum in one form or another that transpired in migration between Italy and North America.¹⁴ The intensity with which fellow historians responded to Harney's insistence on looking at migration as a process in continuity is not surprising¹⁵ for the conceptual framework of transnationalism has been found useful to both historians and anthropologists working on migration.

¹³ Thistlethwaite 22.

¹⁴ Consider, for instance: Robert F. Harney's essays in the collection, *If One Were to Write a History... Selected Writings by Robert F. Harney*, eds. Bruno Ramirez and Pierre Anctil (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1991) 19-36; and Harney, "Men Without Women" (1978).

¹⁵ Consider for instance, some of the early works of Canadian migration historians: Franca Iacovetta, "From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto 1947-62," *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History*, ed. Jean Burnet (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 195-222; Franca Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of Contract Workers...", *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11.1 (Fall 1991): 50-81; Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* (1992); Ramirez, *Les premiers Italiens* (1984); Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); Bruno Ramirez, "Clio in Words and in Motion: Practices of Narrating the Past," *Journal of American History* 86.3 (Dec. 1999): 987-1014; Franc Sturino, *Forging the Chain: Italian Migration to North America, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1990); John E. Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity 1875-1935* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

An early example is Bruno Ramirez's *Les premiers Italiens de Montréal* (1984) which examines the sending communities in tandem with the receiving communities for Montreal's early Italian migrants. In a following study on French-Canadian and Italian migrants in North America, entitled *On the Move* (1991), Ramirez described "the transnational and transcultural character of the migration phenomenon."¹⁶ Of specific interest to my study is Ramirez's focus not only on the "temporal and geographical space separating, but also *linking*, sending and receiving societies."¹⁷

In her study *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* (1984), Donna Gabaccia explores the interconnecting relationships between Italian families in Western Sicily and New York.¹⁸ Similar to other studies of migration from the 1980s, this analysis examines immigrants as active participants in the process of migration. It contributes to the understanding of kinship ties and explores the malleability of households in a context of significant environmental, economic and social change. In her collaborative project, "Italians Everywhere"--which produced two important studies, *Italian Workers of the World* (2001) and *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives* (2002)¹⁹--coupled with her research for the study on Italian global migration, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (2000), Gabaccia

¹⁶ Ramirez, *On the Move* 13.

¹⁷ Ramirez, *On the Move* 13.

¹⁸ Donna R. Gabaccia. *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Donna R. Gabaccia and Fraser M. Ottanelli, eds. *Italian Workers of the World: Labor Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, eds. *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). See also Donna Gabaccia, "Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History," *Journal of American History* 86.3 (Dec. 1999): 1115-1134.

develops her argument that “transnationalism is no invention of a late twentieth-century or postmodern world.”²⁰ As Gabaccia suggests, transnationalism is:

a way of life that connects family, work, and consciousness in more than one national territory. Migration made transnationalism a normal dimension of life for many, perhaps even most, working-class families in Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Family discipline, economic security, reproduction, inheritance, romance and dreams transcended national boundaries and bridged continents.²¹

Apart from its interest for historians of the Italian diaspora, transnational analysis has also prevailed in recent anthropological studies of kinship and migration as exemplified by works on Mexican migration (Rouse 1991, 1996), Portuguese migration (Brettell 1982, 1986, Cole 1990, 1991, 1998) and on Filipina migration (Parrenas 2001, 2005).²² For instance, in his study on Mexican migration, Roger Rouse analyses the

²⁰ Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 11.

²¹ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* 11.

²² Roger Rouse, “Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism,” *Diaspora* 1.1 (1991): 8-23; Roger Rouse, “Thinking Through Transnationalism: Notes on the Cultural Politics of Class Relations in the Contemporary United States,” *Public Culture* 7.2 (1996): 353-402; Caroline Brettell, *We Have Cried Many Tears: The Stories of Three Portuguese Migrant Women* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1982); Caroline Brettell, *Men Who Migrate, Women Who Wait: Population and History in a Portuguese Parish* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Sally Cole, “Cod, God, Country and Family: The Portuguese Newfoundland Cod Fishery,” *Maritime Anthropological Studies* 3.1 (1990): 1-29; Sally Cole, *Women of the Praia: Work and Lives in a Portuguese Coastal Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Sally Cole, “Reconstituting Households, Retelling Culture: Emigration and Portuguese Fisheries Workers,” *Transgressing Borders: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Household and Culture*, eds. S. Ilcan and L. Phillips (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1998) 75-92; Rhacel S. Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Rhacel S. Parrenas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Consider also: Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68.1 (January 1995): 48-63; Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, “Towards a Definition of Transnationalism: Introductory Remarks and Research Questions,” *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, eds. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1992) ix-xiv; Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration,” *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, eds. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1992) 1-24; Linda Basch, Nina Glick

transnational interconnections between communities of migration as the “continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information.”²³ More significantly, by looking at the way migrant workers “have forged socio-spatial arrangements” between Aguililla, Mexico and Redwood City, California, Rouse examines how Aguilillans “are often able to maintain these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbours.”²⁴

In their collaborative research, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1992, 1994, 1995) refer to transnational migration as, “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”²⁵ They view the family as the matrix

Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1994); Nina Glick Schiller, “Transnational Projects: A New Perspective,” *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, eds. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1994); Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-distance Nationalism & the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); B. Feldman-Bianco, “Multiple Layers of Time and Space: The Construction of Class, Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism among Portuguese Immigrants,” *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, eds. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1992) 145-171; Nancy Foner, “What’s New About Transnationalism? New York Immigrants Today and at the Turn of the Century,” *Diaspora* 6.3 (Winter): 355-376; S. Grasmuck and P. Pessar, *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Nicholas Harney, “Building Italian Regional Identity in Toronto: Using Space to Make Culture Material,” *Anthropologica* XLIV (2002): 43-54; Michael Kearney, “The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 547-565; Louise Lamphere, *From Working Mothers to Working Daughters: Immigrant Working Women in a New England Industrial Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Patricia Zavella, *Women’s Work and Chicano Families* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

²³ Rouse, “Mexican Migration and the Social Space” 14.

²⁴ Rouse, “Mexican Migration and the Social Space” 13.

²⁵ Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant” 48.

from which a complexly layered transnational social life is constructed and elaborated.”²⁶ And, they argue that “When we study migration rather than abstract cultural flows or representations, we see that transnational processes are located within the life experience of individuals and families, making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears, and achievements.”²⁷

A) The Flow of Words, Objects and Persons between Kin

In the immediate postwar years in both Italy and Canada the letter was the single most affordable, and thereby, the most popular means of communication exchanged between kin engaged in a process of migration. Letters provided correspondents with information, news, personal reflections, money and other objects. They were also integral to communicating emotions, cultural values, norms, and practices of kinship. As material objects in their own right, letters were inherently transnational objects that moved across international borders while simultaneously crossing complex social, political and familial boundaries. According to David Gerber:

immigrant personal correspondence was an early type of transnational social space... a social location for the staging of relationships, in which... through the medium of writing, immigrants and their correspondents surmounted conventional borders and organized their ongoing connections in order to solve the practical as well as existential problems associated with separation...²⁸

²⁶ Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound* 79.

²⁷ Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant” 50.

²⁸ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 155.

The “wire”²⁹ of communication sustained through letters illustrates the movement of kinship networks unfolding in a context of migration. One of the most important, if not the primary, functions of letter-writing for people involved in the process of migration was to provide a flow of life course news about members of the kinship network. Overwhelmingly, the news concerning the well-being of migrant kin or loved ones who remained behind was the first topic to be addressed in the letters. Sometimes the news about kin was dispatched with formulaic phrases like, “we are happy to hear that you are all well, as the same follows for us in the present,”³⁰ or the more spontaneous, “today I received your letter of the 17th, in which I am pleased to hear that you are well, and that even Nina is feeling better, as the same is for me as well.”³¹ Depending on the kind of relationship that was sustained between the writers, news of kin in the network often centred on major life course events, such as births, deaths, weddings, or illnesses. Typical in this respect was the following excerpt sent from Spilimbergo to Michel, British Columbia: “Gianlorenzo, I’m advising you that Dario del Nero, the friend of your *zio* (uncle) Domenico from Gradisca has died sometime around mid-May, and that at the end of May, Santino Menotti, *marito* (husband) of Sandra Tasini, has died... .”³² Of course,

²⁹ As noted earlier, the term “wire” is used here as a metaphor to mean an invisible, yet indelible cable of communication through which emotions, energies, private reflections and confidences of correspondents flowed throughout the intense and frequent epistolary communication across borders. Bruno Ramirez, personal communication. August 2006.

³⁰ “*siamo contenti a sentire che state tutti bene, come per il presente segue il medesimo di noi.*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello and Mariangela Colonello and Michele Colani, June 14, 1954. Letter no. 48.

³¹ “*mi è giunta oggi la tua del 17 c.m. nella quale sento con piacere che state bene, pure Nina va migliorando, così un simile è anche per me.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

³² “*Gianlorenzo, ti faccio sapere che è morto Dario del Nero il compagno di tuo zio Domenico, quello di Gradisca verso la meta di maggio e verso i ultimi di maggio è morto Santino Menotti, marito di Sandra*

news of the death of a kin member who had previously maintained correspondence within the network carried a particularly grave sense of loss. Carmela Losanto's words, "now, all hope is over,"³³ illustrate this point. In one of her letters written in Ripabottoni, Campobasso to her brother in Montreal, we read how Carmela came to terms with the death of a cousin in Pittsburgh: "now, it's over with the relatives of Pittsburgh. Those who remain have never written. We have never met them in person, nor in writing. They only know how to write American and they don't know Italian, and I can't write American. We are close relatives, and we don't even know each other."³⁴

The news of a birth, on the other hand, was greeted with elation throughout the network and had the effect of creating celebrations in multiple households well beyond the geographic boundaries where the birth took place. We read this in a letter Daniela Perini wrote to her daughter upon hearing that she had become a grandmother: "You can't imagine my happiness in becoming a *nonna*,... as soon as Giuseppe gave me the wonderful news, I invited everyone in the building to celebrate the little Isabella... I even went to Stefania's and almost got her drunk, as well as Filomena and *Signora* Iannucci, who send you their very best wishes..."³⁵

Tasini...." Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello and Mariangela Colonello and Michele Colani, June 14, 1954. Letter no. 48.

³³ "*ora è finito tutta la speranza.*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, September, 1963. Letter no. 278.

³⁴ "*adesso sono finito i parendi da Pittsburga quelli altri che ci sono non anno scritto mai non ci conosciamo in persone ma nemeno a scriverci loro sanno scrivere americani non sanno il tagliano io, non saccio scrivere americani siamo parendi stretti non ci conosciamo...*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, August 17, 1959. Letter no. 254.

³⁵ "*Non puoi immaginare la mia contentezza di essere già nonna, ... non appena appresa la lieta notizia da Giuseppe, ho invitato tutti del palazzo in onore della piccola Isabella... sono andata anche da Stefania e gli ho fatto prendere quasi una sbornia compresa Filomena e la signora Iannucci, che ti mandano tanti Auguri...*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 8, 1961. Letter no. 208.

News of a migrant's son or daughter getting married was greeted with excitement as well, especially if kin members approved of the choice of spouse for the kin member in question. We also witness how kin approval functioned by charting the level of cooperation that other family members exerted in organizing to send official papers about a wedding that had been issued by the town's local parish. Carmela's message to her brother concerning his daughter's wedding illustrate this point: "I'm sending you the papers for Marina's wedding. The priest asked to be paid L1 500 for his troubles in preparing the documents. I already have the money here, so don't worry... ." ³⁶ Approval for the wedding was expressed throughout the network as: "I was very pleased to receive the photograph and meet Marina's *sposo* (groom), and I send her my best wishes." ³⁷ The wedding gifts that were sent from kin in the town to the bride and her family in Montreal, for instance, were also an indication of shared excitement and solidarity between kin across borders. We read this in Carmela's letter: "Lucia, Giuseppina is bringing you a box of cloth handkerchiefs that I'm sending for Marina as a gift that she can use. I would have sent her other things, but I don't know what the custom is in America..." ³⁸

By contrast, revelations about a kin member's illness often induced readers to empathize with the pain as they struggled to acknowledge its impact at a distance. How separation accentuated the sense of pain and the feeling of helplessness is reflected in the

³⁶ "ti mando le carte per Marina del suo spozalizio larciprete siapreso L1,500 lire dai suoi fastidi che ascritto, questi soldi cilavevo qui voi stato tranquilla..." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, July 8, 1963. Letter no. 275.

³⁷ "sono rimasto condento avedere la fotografia ho conosciuto il sposo di Marina e tanti auguri." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, August 16, 1963. Letter no. 277.

³⁸ "Lucia per mezzo di Giuseppina ho mandato una scatola di fazzoletti per Marina per mio ricordo che silipuo usare, io lavesse mandate altri cose ma non saccio quello che si usa in america..." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, December 5, 1963. Letter no. 280

words of Dante del Moro in a letter to his wife Sara regarding his daughter's illness: "*Mia cara moglie* (My dear wife), Today I received your letter of the 6th and with regards to what you're saying about Nina, I don't know if I should write, or I should cry. I don't know what I can do other than keep you in my *pensiero*... I hope that by the time you receive this letter, that everything will be alright. *Dati coraggio* (Don't give up)."³⁹

Similarly, Carmela Losanto wrote to her sister-in-law in Montreal and advised her: "with regards to you, *cognata* (sister-in-law), and your troubles with your stomach, heaven help us with these ailments! And, I hope you will recover soon. I'm so sorry to hear about this wretched illness of the stomach, my dear *cognata*."⁴⁰ Carmela translated her concern over her sister-in-law's health into action by buying the medication requested by her sister-in-law through the local pharmacist and sending it to her through a trusted co-villager who was heading to Montreal during this period. On May 6, 1963, Carmela wrote:

Lucia, I understand everything and I will let you know. The medication is available here. I bought it already. It costs five thousand two hundred and twenty lire, I have already paid for it with the money you have here. So, don't worry. I'm also advising you that I wanted to send the parcel via the post office, but they told me that the package of medication would be opened along the way. It costs L6 000 via air mail. I spoke with Tonino C. who is in charge of preparing packages and he has also told me that the parcel would probably be opened enroute. There is also the risk that the medication would not pass customs. Matteo S. B. is coming to America with his *moglie e figlio* (wife and son) and they'll be leaving on the 23rd of this month of May. He is coming by ship to America and will be arriving on the 5th of

³⁹ "*Mia cara moglie, Oggi mi è giunta la tua del 6 in merito a ciò che mi dici di Nina, non sò se scrivere, o se piangere, non sò cosa posso fare all'infuori di tenermi il mio pensiero continuo su voi... spero ancora che per quando ti arriva questa mia tutto sia per il meglio, dati coraggio...*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 13, 1956. Letter no. 149.

⁴⁰ "*ariguardo di voi, cognata vi trovato ammalato lostomaco sono guai le malattie ma, speriamo diriguarivi presto mia tanto dispiaciuto su divoi, cognata mia, questa maledetta malattia di stomaco.*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, May 6, 1963. Letter no. 272.

June. He will be bringing the medication. Here is his address, you can telephone him when they arrive, so you can go and pick up the medication...⁴¹

The local pharmacist's instructions were also included in the letter with the words, "the pharmacist has told me that there are two types of medication that you need to chew together..."⁴² Concern over the delivery of the medication was reiterated in a letter that Carmela wrote once the personal courier had left the town. She advised her sister-in-law that the person bringing the medication had left on "the 23rd of May and will be arriving in America on the first of June. Call them to check if they've arrived, so you can go and pick up the medication..."⁴³ Clearly, the distance separating kin in a migration process was not necessarily an obstacle to direct action.

Receiving news and greetings from kin signified that despite the physical separation imposed through migration, relatives were not forgotten. The pleasure that was experienced when kin correspondents were reassured of this demonstrated the importance of staying in touch, as we read in Carmela's letter to her brother on January 18, 1959:

"I'm letting you know that I have also received the letter that includes the Christmas

⁴¹"*Lucia ti sono tutto capito poi ti facerò sapere la medicina c'è qui, lo già, comperata e costa lire cinquemila due cento venti lire, e questi soldi celopagato con i soldi vostri che tenete qui, e stato bene tranquilla, poi tifacerò sapere che ti volevo fare il pacco per posta allora mi anno detto il pacco della medicina loaprivono per la strada il pacco per via erea si paa L6000 io ho parlato da Tonino C. questo sinacope di fare i pacchi, allora viripete dandosi c'è la paura dalla medicina se non la dovessano fare passare, allora Matteo S.B. viene alla merica luio la sua moglie acosto dal suo figlio e parte da qui, giorni 23 di questo mese maggio, e viene colla nave alla merica si trove giorni 5 di Giugno arivato e la medicina la porta questo? poi l'indirizzo sono questo che vimando voi potato telefonare a questi quando sono arrivato, velodoveto andare a prendere voi...*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, May 6, 1963. Letter no. 272.

⁴²"*il farmacista miadetto sono due qualità la medicina sidebbo damasticare insieme quando lausate poi voi...*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, May 6, 1963. Letter no. 272.

⁴³"*giorni 23 già Maggio e il primo di Giugno si trove inamerica viandato apigliare la medicina litelefonate se sono arrivato...*" Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, May 24, 1963. Letter no. 273.

wishes from Marina, Anita, and Sandro, and I was so happy to see that my *nipoti* (nephews and nieces) have not forgotten their *zii* (aunts and uncles)...”⁴⁴

Lost letters, on the other hand, had the effect of producing concern over the lost words and written *pensieri* (thoughts and concerns) articulated by kin correspondents. While some of this concern was mitigated by communications with other members of the network, the frustration over lost letters highlights the resilience of the kin wire in migration. It also demonstrates a kin member’s intense desire to keep the connection alive with loved ones across networks. The feelings expressed by Maddalena Franchi’s brother in a letter written from Rome to his sister in Montreal are a case in point:

Carissima sorella (Dearest sister), you tell me that you wrote me a letter while I was away on leave. Unfortunately, I don’t know what happened to the letter because I never received it. I was so very worried that I often asked about you at home to know how you were doing. Just a few days ago, I received a letter from home, and among other things, *mamma* tells me that it’s been some time since she received news from you, and that she too is waiting for some pictures of Isabella. I hope that by the time you receive this, you will have already written to her. She tells me, however, that she is not so worried because I wrote to her telling her that you are in good health, and that I received a photo of the little one.⁴⁵

Similar feelings were expressed in a letter of Carmela Losanto written on January 29, 1962 to her sister-in-law in Montreal:

⁴⁴ “*ti faccio sapere che sono ricevuto anche la lettera del buon Natale da Marina, Anita, e Sandro, e quando sono rimasto condendo sono nipoti non si dimendica dai zii...*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, January 18, 1959. Letter no. 251.

⁴⁵ “*Carissima sorella mi dici di avermi scritto una lettera nel periodo che sono stato in licenza, purtroppo la tua lettera non so che fine abbia fatto perché io non l’ho mai ricevuta, tanto che ero molto preoccupato e ho chiesto spesso tue notizie a casa per sapere della tua salute. Giorni orsono ho ricevuto una lettera da casa, e tra le altre cose mamma mi dice che da un pò di tempo non riceve tue notizie e aspetta anche lei di ricevere qualche fotografia di Isabella, spero che quanto ti giungerà la presente le avrai già scritto. Mi fa sapere, però, che la sua preoccupazione non è tanta perché io le ho scritto dicendole che la tua salute è ottima e che ho ricevuto le foto della piccola.*” Letter from Davide Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, September 27, 1961. Letter no. 196.

Lucia, the letter that was lost was mine. I had written to you and was waiting for your response, the days were passing and my *pensiero* said to me, what happened? Instead, on Saturday, January 27, I received your letter from my *fratello* Mario... you see, when letters are lost, so are the discussions and everything they say. We would need a book, or if we could at least be together for one day, so we could talk *a voce* (in person), and we would have greater satisfaction in understanding each other.⁴⁶

In addition to the letters themselves, a plethora of objects and gifts were also sent back and forth by kin members. These items, which were delivered via regular mail or with the assistance of a personal courier, fulfilled two purposes. They answered requests by kin to be supplied with items of personal necessity, or they were sentimental gifts sent to mark a life-course event or simply because a courier was travelling in that direction. The value of these gifts in strengthening transnational ties was also underscored in the letters. How these objects were viewed as important sites of memory by kin on both sides of the ocean is another question with which I am concerned with.

A careful reading of the letters reveals that money, photographs, clothing, shoes, jewellery, thread for embroidery, and other local speciality items were routinely sent as gifts between kin in Italy and Canada. The bank cheques of eighty dollars that Gianlorenzo Colonello frequently enclosed with his letters to his parents in Spilimbergo, for instance, were gratefully acknowledged, as we read in a letter to Gianlorenzo: "I'm letting you know that on the 11th we received the money for which we are so grateful to

⁴⁶ "Lucia la lettera che è persa è stato la mia perché, io visono risposta e aspettava la vostra risposta i giorni sono passati e io mi diceva, il mio pensiero che cosa è successo invece sabato giorni 27 Gennaio oricevuto la lettera vostra dal fratello Mario... vedi quando siperdono le lettere siperde anche i discorsi e tutto per parlare adesso civolesso un libro o pure mi volerrei trovare almeno una giornata insieme così parlassimo a voci e cicaperemo più sodisfatto." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valessi, January 29, 1962. Letter no. 264.

you.”⁴⁷ Sometimes, along with the letter and cheque, Gianlorenzo included lightweight gifts that a friend or kin member travelling to the same area would deliver. Gianlorenzo’s father advised his son that he had been visited by a friend and received “everything that you explained in the letter.”⁴⁸ Similarly, his mother, in addition to thanking him, itemized all the goods that were delivered by his friend in order to prove that everything was in order. Marianna Domenica wrote: “*Caro Gianlorenzo*, we are so grateful to you for the money, and the stockings that you sent me, Teresa and Gina, the socks for your *padre*. *Nonna* Teresa thanks you for the two dollars as does *nonna* Luigia... .”⁴⁹

The desire to reciprocate was also part of the gift-receiving dynamic witnessed in the correspondence, although circumstances did not always enable such an exchange to occur. In the following excerpt, Marianna Domenica describes this yearning but explains why it was not possible for her to send something in return to her son and his wife. On May 1, 1961, she wrote: “Arcangelo came over and brought your *saluti* (greetings), I would have liked to send you something in return through him, but since he was travelling by airplane, I didn’t dare ask him. You always remember to send us something via anyone who comes this way, and you have always had a big heart for your *genitori* (parents)... .”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “*Ti faccio sapere che il giorno 11 abbiamo ricevuto i soldi il quale ti ringraziamo tanto.*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, November September 15, 1954. Letter no. 47.

⁴⁸ “*tutto come ai spiegato sulla lettera.*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, September 15, 1954. Letter no. 47.

⁴⁹ “*Caro Gianlorenzo siamo molto a ringraziarti dei soldi e poi delle calze che ci ai mandato a me e Teresa e Gina i calzettini e poi al babbo i calzettini la nonna Teresa ti ringrazia dei due dollari come pure la nonna Luigia ti ringrazia...*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, September 15, 1954. Letter no. 47.

⁵⁰ “*Arcangelo e stato a portarvi i saluti vi avrei mandato qualche cosa da lui ma siccome che veniva col aereo non o avuto il coraggio da chiederli, perche anche voi ci ricordate da mandare da tutti quelli che vengono e*

Inevitably, the exchange of gifts was also influenced by life-cycle events, such as an imminent birth in the family or a birthday, or wedding. These exchanges were important because they represented attempts to sustain normal family practice notwithstanding distance. Here, Daniela Perini wrote to her daughter, Maddalena:

Cara figlia, with regards to what I need to send you... I'm sending you something [made by *Signora*...], because as you know she can do beautiful embroideries. It isn't finished yet. If, when your *zia* Rosina comes to visit me, it's ready, that's fine. Otherwise, I'll prepare a parcel myself because even *la comare* Stefania and Filomena want to send you something. Don't worry, when that special moment will arrive, everything will be in order. *Cara figlia*, a few days ago *la comare* (godmother) Anna came to visit, and brought me everything you sent me. Thank you so much for your thoughtful gifts, and thank Giuseppe for the two dollars, and the dollar you sent me.⁵¹

While Maddalena's own words of thanks are not available in the collection, we can surmise the level of meaning these gifts must have represented for her. As we read in her mother's letters, Maddalena was deeply melancholic for the home she had left behind. Moreover, with the birth of her first child approaching, she was very concerned about going through the process in a foreign country with family she barely knew nearby. It seems safe to assume that the gifts that her mother and her godmothers were sending her served as important sites of memory. The "tangibility" of these objects, as anthropologist Loretta Baldassar suggests, "that is, their ability to be 'felt' or at least to be used as a

avete avuto sempre un gran cuore verso di noi genitori... ." Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, May 1, 1961. Letter no. 43.

⁵¹ "*Cara figlia riguardo a ciò che debbo mandare... è già pronto ... ti mando qualche cosa [fatto dalla Signora...], poiché sai bene che sa ricamare, ma però non ha ancora terminato, perciò se per quando viene tua zia Rosina è pronto va bene, altrimenti ti faccio un pacco poichè anche la comare Stefania e Filomena debbono mandare qualche cosa, stai tranquilla che per quando sarà il lieto evento tutto sarà a posto. Cara figlia giorni or sono venne la comare Anna e mi portò tutto quello che mi hai mandato ti ringrazio tanto del pensiero e ringrazio Giuseppe dei due dollari e anche del dollaro che mi hai mandato tu..*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, June 17, 1961. Letter no. 202.

conduit for emotion and feeling by proxy is in many instances more important than their content.” Gifts, cards, letters received in time of need were “evidence of relationships based on reciprocal obligations of caring and embody the participants in this relationship by proxy.”⁵²

The letters also reveal how migrants’ private funds were solicited to help fund local religious festivities in exchange for public recognition of the family’s contribution to the festivities. This public recognition of a family’s financial contributions also worked at another level to demonstrate to local townsfolk that migrants who had left the town had become economically successful yet retained their connection to the townsfolk despite the passage of time and gulf of distance. Indeed, it was important both to the townsfolk and the migrants to ensure that travellers retained their connection to the town and were part of its social memory. As the letters of Carmela Losanto show, while migrants were not obligated to help fund their native town’s social or religious events, they were encouraged simultaneously by co-villagers in Montreal and in Ripabottoni, where a list of donors’ names and the size of their donations was in public view. Many co-villagers in Montreal generously helped fund these local events honouring patron saints back home and targeted their support to the entertainment provided by a local band on the town square or the evening’s fireworks. Some were especially keen both to preserve their names as good citizens with the community in their native town, and to demonstrate to co-villagers in Montreal that they had not forgotten their roots. In this sense, the public exhibition or

⁵² Loretta Baldassar, “ ‘Staying in Touch’ and ‘Being There’: Emotions and the Experience of Co-presence in Transnational Relationships.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. Special Issue on Transnational Families and Emotions. In press. Manuscript kindly shared by the author.

acknowledgement of migrants' gifts signified their "virtual co-presence"⁵³ in the community. In the following letter, Carmela Losanto wrote to her brother and relayed the information that the town-feast organizer had asked her to advise her migrant brothers and her husband on the subject. In this communication, Carmela was the mediator through which information and money were transferred:

Mio caro fratello (My dear brother), I'm now advising you on this matter. Don Mario Filippi is the organizer of the *Festa di San Rocco* and he told me these words with regards to the *Festa di San Rocco*, "write to your *fratello* and to your *marito*, have them send ten dollars each directly in my name. I'll place the banknote on the Saint when the procession starts." This is what Don Mario told me. But you, my *fratello*, if you are pleased to donate something to the Saint, let me know immediately. The day is set for August 16, the *festa* day has not been decided yet. So, I tell you again, if you wish you can give the money directly from the savings you have here. In this way, you don't have to trouble yourself with sending it. You can send L500 or L1 000... to the Saint. It could help us by giving us strength and good health.⁵⁴

In addition to gifts, other objects also flowed between kin across networks. Some objects, including money, official documents, photographs, liquor, clothing, jewellery, a hair-cutting machine, a pasta-making machine, medication, medical instruments, and family recipes were specifically requested by migrants and loved ones. The manner in which these requests were responded to deserves attention. As we observe in the

⁵³ Baldassar, manuscript p. 6.

⁵⁴ "Caro fratello ora tinoto questo fatto Don Mario Filippi è proculatore la festa di S. Rocco e mi adetto questa parola per la festa di S. Rocco scrivi i tuoi fratelli anche tuo marito mandarano 10 dollari perciascuno dimandarlo diretto a nome mio e io lodebbo mettere davanti al Santo quando escie la processione, questo è il discorso che miaparlato Don Mario ma voi fratello se aveto piacere di ofrire qualche cosetta al Santo milofate sapere subito larisposta la giornata è giorni 16 di Agosto la festa non ancora ladedidono, preciso la giornata, dunque ti ripeto se aveto piacere, io celoposso dare anche qui, dei soldi che tenete voi qui, senza che non rimandate se aveto piacere L500 oppure L1 000... al Santo, ciposso aiutare di forza e saluto." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, August 3, 1965. Letter no. 296.

following excerpts, requests were fulfilled efficiently and great care was taken to ensure their prompt and safe delivery. When we look again at Carmela Losanto's efforts in obtaining and delivering the medication required by her sister-in-law, we observe the strengthening of ties through material exchange. What is also revealing here are her words in response to her sister-in-law's gratitude for sending her this much-needed medication. She wrote: "Lucia, you tell me that you care only for me. The same is for me. You are always my *cognata*. How much we have cared for each other even though distance has now kept us apart... ." ⁵⁵

In the letters exchanged between Dante del Moro and Sara Franceschetti, we witness her responsiveness to Dante's ever-expanding list of requested items. In one letter, Sara responded:

Mio caro Dante, I'm writing to you in response to your letter of August 9, in which you indicate a second list of items that I need to bring. I know what you need, including the hair-cutting machine. I spoke with Nando and on the first Monday that he is free, we'll go shopping for these items... I received the money from your brother... I'm starting to shop for the trip and everything else... . ⁵⁶

Nine days later as the preparations for her departure were underway, Sara reassured Dante that, "I've taken note of everything you're telling me, regarding the liquor, I know what you want... ." ⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Lucia midicete che mi tenete solo a mè, anche io che ciò voi siate per semble mia cognata equanto bene cissimo voluto la lontananza ci aseparato... ." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valesi, May 24, 1963. Letter no. 273.

⁵⁶ "Mio caro Dante, ti rispondo alla tua del 9 agosto dove metti la seconda lista della quale io dovrei portar su ho capito cosa ti occorre anche riguardo la macchinetta per capelli ho parlato con Nando il primo lunedì che ha libero andiamo assieme a far la spesa.... Ho avuto i soldi da tuo fratello... incomincio a far le spese pel viaggio e il resto... ." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 18, 1956. Letter no. 101.

⁵⁷ "Tengo nota di tutto quello mi dici riguardo i liquori ho capito cosa vuoi... ." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 27, 1956. Letter no. 88.

In this letter-series, we also observe both the material nature of requests and the expanding web of contacts that gift-giving produced as some migrants increasingly became merchandise suppliers to their home communities. As a result, the list of items to send or bring expanded continually, not only because of the emerging needs of one household, but also because members of other households of kin nearby were making their requests as well. This dynamic is witnessed in Dante's letters to Sara: "Do you remember those two beige woollen undershirts that I had bought last year?... If you find them, you need to buy four more for me, and Angela wants 6 for Elio... ." ⁵⁸ In other letters, he added: "See if you can find two thermometers for fevers, one for Elio, and one for us... ." ⁵⁹ and "Angela here is asking you to remember to bring the recipe for the *focaccia*." ⁶⁰

Easily overlooked in the network of exchange was the role of the friends and relatives who acted as couriers, bearers of news and go-betweens. As the travel plans of kin, friends and acquaintances became known, families often made a special effort to write a letter, prepare a parcel or send greetings with the traveller. Likewise, letter-writers made special efforts to locate personal couriers who could be entrusted with delivering papers, gifts or news that had particular importance.

Yet, not all items could be delivered. Partly, this depended on whether the personal courier's mode of transportation was by ship or airplane. Sometimes, all the personal

⁵⁸ "ti ricordi quelle due canottiere color carne, fine di lana che avevo comperato l'hanno scorso? ... se ne trovi devi comperarmene altre quattro per me, e poi Angela ne vuole 6 per Elio... ." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁵⁹ "vedi di comperare due termometri per la febbre, uno per Elio, e uno per noi... ." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 9, 1956. Letter no. 167.

⁶⁰ "La Angela qui ti raccomanda la ricetta per la focaccia.." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 16, 1956. Letter no. 173.

courier could bring was simply a letter or even just *saluti*, as Marianna Domenica wrote to Gianlorenzo: “on Tuesday the 23rd, Dario of Fana left. We asked him to bring our *saluti* to you. He too could not bring anything with him. I would have liked him to bring something for you, but since he was travelling by plane, he couldn’t bring anything... .”⁶¹

Moreover, letters and *saluti* received by a loved one or migrant had the potential of having a profound effect on recipients. Their resonance was such that the personal courier as messenger could be seen as embodying *in carne ed ossa* (in flesh and blood), “the internalised presence of transnational kin and country *by proxy*.”⁶² We witness this phenomenon in Marianna Domenica’s letter to her son written after she had been visited by his fellow friend, who resembled him and also lived in Montreal: “*Mi sembrava da vederti te*” (“It was like seeing you here”),⁶³ she wrote, adding: “*Caro figlio Gianlorenzo... grazie* (thank you) for the dollars you sent us through your friend... What I would pay to see you... .”⁶⁴

Nor did the ties between personal couriers and loved ones end the moment that a parcel or letter was delivered at its destination for the relationship between personal courier, sender and receiver was also based on “reciprocal obligations of caring.”⁶⁵ This kind of reciprocity is observed in a letter written by Luciano Colonello to his son: “So,

⁶¹ “*martedì giorno 23 e partito Dario quello in Fana e noi li abbiamo detto che vi porti i saluti lui pure non a potuto portar niente volevo darle qualche cosa che vi porti ma sicome e partito col aereo così non a potuto portar niente... .*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, May 25, 1961. Letter no. 45.

⁶² Baldassar, manuscript p. 9.

⁶³ “*mi sembrava da vederti te.*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

⁶⁴ “*Caro figlio Gianlorenzo... grazie dei dollari che ci ai mandato per le mani del tuo compagno... quanto pagherei a vederti... .*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

⁶⁵ Baldassar, manuscript p. 9.

you advised us that a young man from Casarsa has arrived in Italy, and that you gave him ten dollars to give to us. A few days ago, he came here with his cousin to bring us the money. They came in their motorcycle, and he promised to visit us again on the day of *San Rocco*.”⁶⁶

When personal couriers made round trips to and from a destination, they also had an obligation to relay fresh news from abroad back to the families or individuals who had dispatched them in the first place. Not only was it a primary concern, it was also expected by all parties involved that the personal courier would take the time to discuss how things went upon visiting the migrant’s family back home. In a letter written from August of 1960, Marianna wrote to her son upon hearing that these friends had returned home, and had given news to him: “We’re happy that Berto and Maria came to visit you and give you our *saluti*. We’re also pleased that they told you many things... .”⁶⁷

Although the letter “was always the place in which information was shared on what was needed or desirable, on the best means for its conveyance, and on when and where it could be expected to arrive,”⁶⁸ the form also had its limits. To be able to *parlare a voce* (speak in person) even through a proxy, was viewed in some cases as more effective than writing letters. This was especially true with individuals whose literacy skills presented a challenge when writing letters. Through the co-presence of the personal courier, relaying information that was previously difficult to explain in writing or open to

⁶⁶ “*Dunque tu ci ai fatto sapere che e venuto in Italia uno giovine da Casarsa e che ai dato dieci dollari, così lui e stato a portarcili giorni fa con un suo cugino erano venuti con una moto, ma pero a detto che ritorna il giorno di S. Rocco a trovarci.*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

⁶⁷ “*Siamo contenti che Berto e Maria sono stati a portarvi i saluti e vi anno pure raccontato tante cose... .*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 23, 1960. Letter no. 35.

⁶⁸ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 157.

misunderstandings on paper was viewed as a less complicated and more straightforward form of communication. A letter that Carmela Losanto wrote to her brother in Montreal regarding the arrival of her nephew demonstrates my point: “We’re talking on paper, you *fratello* (brother), can’t understand me. When Sandro returns, he’ll explain everything to you.”⁶⁹ The next day, Sandro and his wife wrote to his father in Montreal advising him that all was well and that, “when we’re there, we’ll speak in person.”⁷⁰ The expectation that the personal courier would relay *a voce* (in person) all of the news obtained back home is reiterated in the following words of Carmela upon learning that her nephew had forwarded her news to her brother in Montreal: “*Caro mio fratello*, I understand everything, and I’m so pleased that Sandro has told you everything about this place... .”⁷¹ Clearly, Carmela was quite pleased that her nephew had, as accurately as possible, relayed all the news she needed her brother to hear *a voce*.

B) The Support Strategies of Kinship in Migration Networks

As a number of migration studies suggest, kinship networks provided vital forms of support to loved ones and migrants across borders. According to Tamara Hareven, “‘Long-distance’ kin, like those nearby, were sources of security and assurance in times of crisis and often served as a refuge.”⁷² Moreover, kin networks that were engaged in a

⁶⁹ “*parliamo con la carta voi fratello non mi poteto capire quando ritorna Sandro vi fa capire tutto.*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, August 11, 1964. Letter no. 286.

⁷⁰ “*quando veniamo parliamo a voce.*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, August 12, 1964. Letter no. 287.

⁷¹ “*Caro mio fratello e tutto ti sono bene capito tanto piacere Sandro vi ha fatto sapere una cosa di tutto da qui... .*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, October 19, 1964. Letter no. 289.

⁷² Hareven, *Family Time & Industrial Time* 114-115.

process of migration, “s’étendaient toutefois à plusieurs localités et ces liens étaient mis à contribution lorsque la communauté locale traversait des périodes difficiles ou durant les périodes de migration.”⁷³ Letters played a key role in maintaining communications across these networks. Indeed, as Baldassar argues, “the ritual exchange of greeting cards... are a visible sign of enduring relationships that may be operating in an almost dormant state but that can be activated or called upon in times of need.”⁷⁴ Yet beyond maintaining base levels of contact, letters could also activate strong emotions across different parts of the kin network.

One of the most striking features of kinship support in the letters is the over-arching care that was provided by kin in Italy for loved ones who, as a result of their kin’s migration, felt abandoned and more alone than ever. This phenomenon is reflected in all six of the letter-series. Some of the more significant examples include Marianna Domenica’s words to her sister-in-law in Montreal concerning her mother’s well-being, in which she wrote: “Your family at home is well, and even your mother is doing fine. It’s just that, poor her, she can’t walk too much, but she’s still strong and eats well. Nives, don’t worry about her, she has everything she needs. Alba, your *cognata*, and everyone else, love her so very much. I often visit her and spend a few hours with her... .”⁷⁵

⁷³ Tamara K. Hareven, “Les grands thèmes de l’histoire de la famille aux États-Unis,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 39.3 (automne 1985) 193.

⁷⁴ Baldassar, manuscript p. 8.

⁷⁵ “*i tuoi di casa stano bene anche la tua mamma sta bene solo poveretta non camina tanto ma e molto bene grassa tu Nives non pensare per lei che lei non le manca niente. Alba tua cognata e poi tutti le voliano un gran bene vado spesso a trovarla e passo qualche oretta chiacherando con lei... .*” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Nives Fama, August 18, 1954. Letter no. 20.

In Maddalena's case, while she was initially urged by her brother to write often to her mother because "she has practically remained alone," as a result of "the empty days she feels since you left,"⁷⁶ both her brother and her mother later reassured her that her mother was fine. And, ten months later, Daniela Perini confirmed her well-being by writing to her daughter: "*Cara figlia* (Dear daughter), don't feel sorry for me, I am never alone in the evenings. Sometimes I go see Graziella, or I visit *Signora Quarini* and watch television at her home,"⁷⁷ and "Don't worry about me, because every day and every night, I'm at *Signora Sistini's*, like when you were here and we used to visit *Signora Panetti*."⁷⁸ Even several years later, Maddalena's brother reassured her that their aging mother was well taken care of, as he wrote: "don't worry about *mamma*, because either I or Assunta, now more than ever, we are close to her, and we'll do our best to help her enjoy these days as serenely as possible."⁷⁹ In the letters of Carmela Losanto, this kind of support provided by loved ones who remained behind was equally explicit. In the following, she described to her sister-in-law in Montreal how her mother was doing, and some of the difficulties she was experiencing as a result of being alone: "I went to visit your *mamma*, and on that day, even your *cognata* Messalina came with me... your *mamma* is well. She

⁷⁶ "*praticamente lei è rimasta sola,*" "*le giornate vuote che si è venuta a trovare con la tua partenza.*" Letter from Davide Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, November 22, 1960. Letter no. 180.

⁷⁷ "*Cara figlia, non prenderti pena per me, la sera non sono mai sola, qualche volta vado dalla Graziella, oppure vado dalla Signora Quarini a vedere la televisione.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 30, 1961. Letter no. 206.

⁷⁸ "*Stai tranquilla per me, poiché tanto al giorno quanto alla sera vado sempre dalla Signora Sistini, come quando c'eri tu e si andava dalla Signora Panetti.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, December 10, 1961. Letter no. 201.

⁷⁹ "*non preoccuparti per mamma, perché tanto io che Assunta, ora più che mai, le staremo sempre vicino e cercheremo, nei migliori dei modi, di farle passare i giorni più serenamente possibile.*" Letter from Davide Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, n.d., estimated 1966. Letter no. 227.

was complaining that she'd like to have some company at night. During the day, neighbors and friends nearby visit her, but at night, everyone stays in their homes... ."⁸⁰

Family members who stayed behind were equally active in giving support to arriving migrants. The logic with which kin or friends were solicited to assist arriving migrants, and the extent to which kin assistance was sought, deserves attention here. By weaving the multiple connections between kin across networks witnessed in the correspondence, we observe a circulatory pattern in the way information about migrating kin was relayed and assistance was recruited. The "circulatory" character of Italian migrations described by Donna Gabaccia,⁸¹ is analogous to the logic by which information flowed between networks in a process of migration. Here is one scenario that illustrates my point. On September 15, 1954, Marianna wrote to her son advising him that:

Alberto has arrived in Montreal. However, his parents are worried because they don't know if he has found a job or not. Poor them, they too have made many sacrifices to send him away, and now, no one knows where he is. You, Gianlorenzo, see if you can find work for him. Here's his address: Colonello Alberto, Emigration 1162 S.t. Antuine S.t. Montreal QEC. Canada. I beg you, as soon as you know something, write to me immediately so I can right away visit *la nonna* and tell her the news... .⁸²

⁸⁰ "io sono stato dalla tua mamma e quel giorno ci è venuto anche la cognata Messalina... la tua mamma l'ho trovato bene ma solo si è lagnato che la notte volessa un pò dicombagnia il giorno ci vanno molte gende vicinanzo ma la notte la genda stanno a casa loro... ." Letter from Carmela Losanto to Lucia Valesi, January 29, 1962. Letter no. 264.

⁸¹ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* 9.

⁸² "a Montreal è arrivato Alberto ma i suoi genitori sono in pensiero perché non sanno se a preso lavoro lì oppure se a preseguito poveri anche loro anno fatto sacrifici per mandarlo via e adesso povero chissà in dove si trova tu Gianlorenzo guarda se puoi trovarle lì lavoro io qui ti metto il suo indirizzo Colonello Alberto, Emigration 1162 S.t. Antuine S.t. Montreal QEC. Canada. Ti prego tanto appena sai qualche cosa di scrivimi subito che io vado dalla nonna a darle sue notizie... ." Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, September 15, 1954. Letter no. 47.

Voicing similar concerns, Gianlorenzo's aunt in Michel, British Columbia wrote to

Gianlorenzo:

Yesterday, I received a letter from home. Everyone is well. Your *mamma* tells me that your *cugino* (cousin), *figlio* (son) of your *zio* (uncle) Mario has arrived in Montreal. I know him... Your *zio* Beppi and I have been talking about your *cugino*, and we were wondering if he is the same as he was before... Nonetheless, the mines in Alberta have nearly all closed, and all the jobs here are being filled... *mi dispiace proprio* (I'm very sorry).⁸³

Three days later, Gianlorenzo's mother in Spilimbergo wrote to Gianlorenzo: "I'm so happy that Alberto is staying with you. Poor soul, at least, he's with someone whom he knows. I hope you can help him find work there, so he would be near you... All the *zii* here, and *la nonna* thank you for generously helping Alberto. Everyone is happy to hear that he's there with all of you. Give him our best greetings."⁸⁴ In the same letter, Marianna Domenica also included a few words to Gianlorenzo's uncle and aunt (who lived near him): "From the bottom of my heart, my family thanks you for your interest in Alberto and for taking care of him. They are so happy that he is staying with you..."⁸⁵ Soon after, we learn that Gianlorenzo's cousin had indeed found a job in Montreal: "We

⁸³ "Ieri ebbi avuto lettera di casa pure loro stanno tutti bene dove pure tua mamma mi faceva sapere che e venuto a Montreal tuo cugino il figlio di tuo zio Mario, lo conosco... Io e tuo zio Beppi si parlava per via di tuo cugino che se era come una volta... Ma adesso che le mine del Alberta sono quasi tutte chiuse e li prendono su tutti qui... così mi dispiace proprio." Letter from Mariangela Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, November 3, 1954. Letter no. 24.

⁸⁴ "sono tanto contenta che Alberto si trova da voi almeno poverino a qualcuno che conose spero che potete trovarle lavoro lì, così sarebe vicino voi... per Alberto i zii tutti ti ringraziano come pure la nonna per il cuore che ai avuto per Alberto sono stati tutti contenti a sentire che Alberto e con voi salutalo tanto." Letter from Marianna Domenica and Luciano Colonello, November 6, 1954. Letter no. 50.

⁸⁵ "grazie di cuore per il vostro interesamento per Alberto i miei vi ringraziano tanto e poi tanto e sono contenti che si trova con voi..." Letter from Marianna Domenica to Domenico Colonello and Nives Fama, November 6, 1954. Letter no. 50.

are happy that Alberto has found work...,”⁸⁶ and that the family back home was wholeheartedly grateful to Gianlorenzo and his uncle and aunt for helping him. Luciano Colonello wrote, “Even today my *cognata* Maria, *mamma* of Alberto, has asked me to write to you, as she is deeply grateful to you and Gianlorenzo for everything you have done for Alberto. Please give him our best greetings.”⁸⁷

What this vignette shows is that inquiries on the whereabouts of an arriving migrant often extended through several households within a kin network that was spread over thousands of miles. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of work-related inquiries that were made on behalf of migrants (and sometimes even without their knowledge). In addition to advocating on behalf of migrants, letters also served as important instruments of moral support to family and friends who were coping with their new surroundings in Canada. They encouraged them to take care of themselves and their families, to seek out other kin, or develop kin-like relationships so that they would not suffer the loneliness and nostalgia that accompanied leaving home. In the letters of Daniela Perini we observe words of encouragement that inveighed her daughter to take care of her family, and to seek comfort from other kin nearby, as she wrote: “*Cara figlia*, I’m very pleased to hear in your letter that you and Giovanna are getting along so well and that you care for each other. Try to always be there for each other like sisters. I urge you to love your *padre*

⁸⁶ “*Siamo pur contenti che Alberto a incominciato a lavorare...*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, December 8, 1954. Letter no. 19.

⁸⁷ “*Oggi stesso e stata mia cognata Maria mamma di Alberto la quale mincarinca a scrivervi, che lei vi ringrazia tanto voi, quanto pure a Gianlorenzo, a quello che avete fatto per Alberto. Salutatelo a nome nostro.*” Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello and Domenico Colonello and Nives Fama, December 8, 1954. Letter no. 19.

(father), your *madre* (mother), your *marito* (husband) and everyone at home... .”⁸⁸ These words of encouragement from mother to daughter bring me to another point, namely the expectation that personal happiness revolved around the family. As the letters of kin show, family was paramount to the survival and personal well-being of its members. The dearth of attention in the letters to issues related to personal aspirations and autonomy indicates that little, if any importance was allocated to self-realization and individuality in the life script prescribed by the letter-writers and their universe.

Loved ones back home were also engaged in taking care of the houses migrants had left behind upon departing for Canada. The letters of Carmela Losanto illustrate this point as the discussion of her brother’s house in the village occupied center stage in much of the correspondence. As Carmela explained to her brother, she had willingly accepted the task of taking care of his house because that was an essential part of sustaining the family: “*fratello*, you’re concerned that I have a lot to worry about with regards to your matters here, but for me, it’s nothing, because we care so much for each other... My heart is always with you, my *nipoti* (nephews and nieces) and my *cognata* Lucia, for all the love that we share, I think of you all... .”⁸⁹

As letters exchanged between Maddalena and her family demonstrate, kin in Italy also served as an enormous resource in locating and negotiating the purchase of housing for a migrant and her family who wished to return back home, either temporarily or

⁸⁸ “*Cara figlia, mi fa molto piacere sapere della tua lettera che con Giovanna andate molto d’accordo e vi volete bene, cercate sempre di volervi bene e fate conto di essere come due sorelle, quello che mi raccomando è di voler bene a Tuo padre, Tua madre, Tuo marito e a tutti di casa... .*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, May 1, 1961. Letter no. 210.

⁸⁹ “*fratello voi mipenzato a mè che io debbo pensare i fatti vostri ma per mè, non è proprio niende perché siamo tanto cari... il mio cuore stà sempre sù di voi, i miei nipoti la mia cognata Lucia per il bene ci siamo voluto che io vopenzo a tutti... .*” Letter from Carmela Losanto to Domenico Losanto, September 3, 1961. Letter no. 262.

permanently. For instance, in one letter, Davide Franchi wrote to his sister: “Regarding the apartment... The other day I was in Ostia at Zia Maria’s and out of curiosity, I visited an apartment with Luciana, even just to see what the market value is estimated at in the area... .”⁹⁰ Not long after, Maddalena’s mother described her excitement about the apartment in Rome that was purchased for her daughter by proxy, and what it meant in terms of family reunification: “Davide told me that he’s rented out your apartment. You can’t imagine how happy I am of your home, so that we can all be together. Davide has described to me how he is renovating it. It’s a real gem. You should be happy about it, so that when you’ll be returning to Italy, you’ll find a home in perfect order as it should be... .”⁹¹

The letters illustrate that family members on both sides of the Atlantic also offered experiential knowledge on matters related to migration procedures. They provided arriving migrants with much-needed advice on travel arrangements, as well as what a travelling family member could expect to find upon disembarking the ocean liner in Halifax. The letters of Dante del Moro to his wife, Sara provide a good illustration of the kind of advice that flowed across borders. On April 7, 1956, Dante urged Sara to begin preparing for the trip to Canada. He wrote: “I spoke with the notary here, and briefly he told me that I don’t need to send you anything,... all you need to do is go to the travel

⁹⁰ “*Riguardo all’appartamento... L’altro giorno sono stato ad Ostia da zia Maria e per curiosità sono andato a vedere insieme a Luciana a visitare un’appartamento anche per vedere quanto vanno da quelle parti... .*” Letter from Davide Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, May 10, 1963. Letter no. 230.

⁹¹ “*Davide mi ha detto che a preso in affitto il vostro appartamento non puoi immaginare quanto sono contenta sia per la casa ed anche per stare tutti insieme. Davide mi ha detto come la stà mettendo su e un amore e di questo dovete essere contenti anche voi così quando sarà che ritornate in Italia trovate una casa come si deve... .*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, November 26, 1963. Letter no. 220.

agency... and explain everything... ”⁹² In terms of suggestions for travelling on ship, he wrote: “ask for tourist-class cabins, even though it’s a little more expensive, it doesn’t matter. The most important thing is that you are comfortable, I don’t want you to stay in the large sleeping hall because it makes for difficult travelling.”⁹³ In August, when the date of departure was approaching, Dante wrote: “Keep in mind one thing: you must send the wooden trunks over directly to Powell River, otherwise you’ll be forced to open them at customs in Halifax. Instead, if they arrive here, you’ll need to pass customs here... Buy your train tickets for Vancouver instead. I’ll give you more instructions on this later.”⁹⁴

For their arrival in Halifax, Dante advised Sara:

At the customs office in Halifax, there are a few shops in which you’ll find everything you need, bread and canned foods, whatever you like that you can eat on the train. On the train from Montreal to Vancouver, if you still need something, ask one of your travelling companions for help. There’s always someone getting off at various stations [to buy items]. Don’t try to get off the train yourself, because you risk losing it, as it happened when I came over... ”⁹⁵

⁹² “*ho parlato con il notaio di qui, e in poche parole mi ha detto che non occorre che io ti mandi niente, ... basta che tu vada all’agenzia viaggi,... spiegali tutto...* ” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, April 7, 1956. Letter no. 158.

⁹³ “*fatti segnare la cabina in classe turistica, anche sebbene costa un pò di più, non importa, l’interessante è di star bene, non voglio che tu vada in camerone, perché là si viaggia male.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, April 7, 1956. Letter no. 158.

⁹⁴ “*Tieni ben presente una cosa: I bauli devi spedirli qui direttamente a Powell River, senò ti toccherà aprirli alla dogana di Halifak, mentre se vengono qui, la dogana la passano qui... Invece i tuoi biglietti del treno li prendi fino a Vancouver. In merito ti darò istruzioni più chiare.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁹⁵ “*Alla dogana di Alifas, ci sono dei negozi, e li trovi di tutto, come pane e scattolani, così ti comperi quello che più ti piace, e ti occorre per mangiare in treno. Poi quando sei in viaggio da Montreal a Vancouver se ti occorre ancora qualc’osa te la fai prendere dai compagni di viaggio, che cen’è sempre che scende sulle diverse stazioni, mà tu non fidarti di andar giù dal treno, perché vai rischio di perderlo, come è successo quando sono venuto io...* ” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 16, 1956. Letter no. 173.

Furthermore, migrant kin also sent official papers to help loved ones facilitate, and possibly expedite, the procedures for them to migrate quickly to Canada. In addition, they actively linked up individuals within their networks who would be travelling in the same direction and could accompany a loved one travelling alone. A letter that Clara Montorio wrote to her beloved Maurizio illustrates this point: “I have here with me your ticket for embarkment. I’m just waiting to telephone *Signor* Frattini tonight in order to know how I should proceed at this point, afterwhich I’ll immediately send you the papers.”⁹⁶ In this letter, Clara also encouraged Maurizio to travel via France for two reasons: “my *padre* would be pleased if you travelled via France, so you could meet and bring *saluti* to his brothers... .”⁹⁷ And, because a family friend was travelling along the same route at roughly the same time, she advised Maurizio that this person, “will also be arriving here, and it seems he will be travelling along the same route... we would be so happy if you could travel together.”⁹⁸ She thus urged Maurizio to “write to him and make arrangements together so that we can come together to meet you in Quebec...”⁹⁹.

In addition to providing general information about travel the letters also demonstrate how migrants who had settled earlier in Canada offered much-needed advice on how best to take advantage of the new Sponsorship program. Here, for example, is a letter written by Dante’s cousin urging him to migrate to Canada:

⁹⁶ “Già sono in possesso del tuo biglietto d’imbarco ma aspetto di telefonare al signor Frattini questa sera per sapere come devo procedure poi subito te lo spedirò.” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, July 18, 1949. Letter no. 317.

⁹⁷ “mio papà ha piacere che tu venga per la Francia così prima potrai conoscere e salutare i suoi fratelli... .” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, July 18, 1949. Letter no. 317.

⁹⁸ “debba finire qui e faccia proprio il tuo stesso giro... saremmo felicissimi se poteste fare il viaggio assieme.” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, July 18, 1949. Letter no. 317.

⁹⁹ “scrivi a lui e mettetevi d’accordo così verremo tutti assieme ad aspettarvi a Quebec... .” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, July 18, 1949. Letter no. 317.

Caro cugino, I have read and reread your letter, and it feels like a dream that you too are thinking of coming to these lands. I want to tell you that I delayed writing to you because I wanted some more information, but in the end, ... the information I received is that you need to write a letter *ben scritta* (well-written) to the Canadian Consulat in Rome, stating my name and address of where I live... you can tell them that I assume full responsibility of you upon entering Canada... ”¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the moment Dante arrived in Vancouver on March 22, 1956, he was so impressed with the welcome and reception he received from his godmother and his cousin that he immediately wrote to his wife telling her that:

At the station, I found who was waiting for me, someone I was not expecting, my *santola* (godmother) Lidia Prusani. And, I must tell you, *cara moglie*, that I have no words to describe my joy... She took me out, got me into a car, and there we were heading to the ferry boat station. In ten minutes we were home. Here, I can't begin to tell you the kind of welcome that awaited me. It was as if I were the president of Vancouver. There was everything and anything imaginable to eat, all to my heart's content. Then, she took me to visit her brother Marco at the Hotel, and there too, what a welcome! Then, she took me to visit several Italian friends at their homes. We picked up groceries and we were out until suppertime, and then, once again, we went back out. Imagine that they had already found a job for me... Last night, we immediately called Elio on the telephone, which he has in his home, and as soon as he heard my voice, he didn't know whether to laugh, or cry. For now, we said "hello" and arranged a meeting. He's expecting me on Sunday night. I wanted to head that way earlier, but my *santola* would not let me go at any cost, because, as she said, 'you're tired, first rest and then you'll go up.' Perhaps, that was best, since I was extremely tired. Imagine that *la santola* missed two days of work, as she waited for me. We were supposed to arrive on Wednesday this week, but there were some train delays, and we lost a day. Now, as I write to you, I'm at Lidia's house. She went to work, and I'm here

¹⁰⁰ “*Caro cugino, o letto e riletto la tua lettera mi sembrava un sogno che pure tu pensi di venire in questi paesi. Voglio dirti tardai di scriverti per il motivo che o voluto informazioni ma infine..., il solo che ebi in esito e che tu scrivi una lettera ben scritta al Consolato Canadese in Roma, dandoli il nome e indirizzo di ove io mi trovo... puoi dirli che io mi prendo la piena responsabilità di te una volta entrato in Canada... .*” Letter from Elio Santini to Dante del Moro, September 4, 1955. Letter no. 129.

alone. I just prepared for myself a nice morning snack, fried eggs with butter, and strawberries in a syrup, pastries, and so much more. I tell you this, never before in my life have I found myself in these circumstances. Last night, Elio called, and confirmed that he'll be home next week, and as far as I know, Monday I start to work...¹⁰¹

Not surprisingly, kinship support was also integral to sustaining romantic relationships disrupted through migration. Messages relayed from parents or grandparents living in the same household as the letter-writer were included in letters in order to demonstrate that a relationship *à distance* was approved by kin. This was an important consideration for the couple when plans for reunion or marriage were being made. For example, in his correspondence, Giordano Rossini often included his grandmother's words of *saluti* to his sweetheart Ester. We also witness kinship's approval of romantic relations at a distance in Giordano's recapitulation of conversations with his grandmother concerning Ester:

Today when I got back, *nonna* showed me 3 cups of Japanese porcelain... As she showed them to me, she said, 'This cup is for Ester, this one is mine, and this one is yours.' She kept the most beautiful cup for you. It has golden butterflies on the face of it, mine is completely in

¹⁰¹ "alla stazione ho trovato che mi aspettava, chi meno mi aspettavo, mia santola Lidia Prusani, e non ho parole, cara moglie, per dirti quanta è stata la mia gioia... mi ha portato fuori, ha preso una macchina e via alla stazione del ferri boat dieci minuti e si era ha casa sua. Qui non ti dico che accoglienza meglio che non fossi il presidente di Vancouver, da mangiare, di ogni colore a volontà. Poi mi ha portato da suo fratello Marco all'Hotel e lì altrettanto, poi in casa di amici suoi Italiani, dopo fuori a fare spesa e così fino a ora di cena, e dopo fuori ancora, e pensa che loro mi avevano già trovato lavoro... Ieri sera subito hanno chiamato Elio al telefono, che lui lo ha in casa, e appena ha sentito la mia voce non sapeva se ridere, ho piangere, così intanto, ci siamo salutati e dati appuntamento, lui mi aspetta Domenica sera. Io volevo andar su prima ma qui la santola non mi ha lasciato a tutti costi, perché sei stanco, prima ti riposi bene, e poi vai su, e forse è stato meglio, ne avevo bisogno. Pensa che la santola ha perso due giorni di lavoro, per venirmi ad aspettare, e in effetti si doveva arrivare mercoledì s.c. ma causa i ritardi del treno, abbiamo perso un giorno. Ora che ti scrivo sono in casa di Lidia, lei è andata al lavoro, ed io sono in casa da solo, mi son fatto una buona merenda, uova all'occhio e burro, poi fragole al sciroppo, paste e non ti dico altro, solo una cosa che in vita mia forse è la prima volta che mi trovo ha questo punto. Ieri sera Elio mi ha detto che la settimana prossima sta a casa, e ha quanto ho capito, forse lunedì comincio il lavoro... ." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, March 23, 1956. Letter no. 157.

violet, and *nonna*'s is white with flowers and it has two handles. You see, *Cara*, even *nonna* thinks of you always. She loves you so...¹⁰²

In the letter-series of Clara Montorio, her effort to include the words of immediate family members in her letters to her beloved Maurizio are also indicative of her effort to expand the web of approval for their relationship. When Clara did not see for some time a word of *saluti* from his family in his letters to her, she inquired directly about the silence by addressing his mother and father:

Mamma e papà cari, some time has passed since I read your writing, how come? I greatly enjoyed reading your writing--How are you? Do you remember me? I too think of you often with much affection--We are all well. *Papà* asks me to send you his *saluti*, as does *mamma*. Here, it's already getting very cold. *Signor* Francesco, are you familiar with the cold weather of Montreal? *Saluti* to the whole family, and to you, infinite *baci*, yours Clara.¹⁰³

In her appeal for a response from them, Clara emphasized the bonds between her and Maurizio's parents in order to underscore the affective relations shared between them in the past. Significantly, she also referred to them as mother and father, even though she and Maurizio were not yet married at the time. Soon after, Maurizio's parents responded as Clara's subsequent letters reveal.

¹⁰² "oggi quando sono tornato nonna mi ha fatto vedere 3 tazze di porcellana giapponese, ... mostrandomele ha detto 'Questa sarà la tazza di Ester, questa la mia e questa la tua, a te ti ha destinata la tazza più bella, è tappezata con farfalle d'orate, la mia è tutta viola, quella della nonna è a due manici ed è bianca con fiori; vedi Cara anche nonna pensa sempre a te, ti vuole tanto bene...' " Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 18, 1957. Letter no. 359.

¹⁰³ "mamma e papà cari, da qualche tempo non vedo più la vostra calligrafia, come mai? Mi facevano tanto piacere i vostri scritti--Come state? Vi ricordate di me?... Io pure non manco di pensarvi con tanto affetto--Noi stiamo bene, il papà m'incarica di salutarvi tanto così pure la mamma--Qui incomincia a fare tanto freddo, lei Sig. Francesco lo conosce il freddo di Montreal! Saluti a tutti i famigliari ed a loro bacioni infiniti, vostra Clara." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 14, 1948. Letter no. 315.

C) Forms of Control and Discipline of Kinship in Migration

While kinship networks functioned on many levels to provide support for families experiencing the realities of migration, they also produced a coercive counter-effect by placing significant emotional and social pressures on migrants and loved ones to “stay the course.” Just as kinship support was deployed across borders through the language of patriarchal values and norms in personal correspondence, mechanisms of social control and “family discipline” also “transcended national boundaries and bridged continents.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, the observations of anthropologist Fortunata Piselli on the operations of kinship in migration specifically point to kinship as “the most important form of interaction that, as a conditioning structure, became an object of manipulation.”¹⁰⁵

In this context letters played an especially crucial role in reminding—both explicitly and implicitly--kin members about their duties and obligations while providing an alternative vehicle to express the voices of authority of parents, spouses, siblings, lovers and so on. The “naturalness” with which social duties and gender obligations were assumed and reproduced by kin across migration networks exemplifies the culturally constructed notion of “common sense” defined by Gramsci, as the “traditional popular conception of the world.”¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the seductiveness of “common sense” knowledge rests in its invisibility as an expression of “traditional” forms of thought, ideologies, expectations, and roles that were viewed, as Clifford Geertz writes as both

¹⁰⁴ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* 11.

¹⁰⁵ “La parentela rimane la categoria più importante di interazione ma da struttura condizionante è diventata oggetto di manipolazione.” My translation. Fortunata Piselli, *Parentela ed Emigrazione. Mutamenti e continuità in una comunità calabrese* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981) 171.

¹⁰⁶ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 199.

natural and practical.¹⁰⁷ The inherent qualities of common sense as “natural and practical,” and “taken for granted” as Pierre Bourdieu also observes,¹⁰⁸ are precisely what make familial duties and obligations seem inapparent yet resilient. These structures of conformity operated strongly in postwar Italian families especially where parental advice and what Colleen Johnson calls “reminders,” were concerned.¹⁰⁹

The letters exchanged between parents and children, for instance, repeatedly offered evidence of the social control and family discipline that parents who remained behind attempted to exercise. By offering advice, encouragement and reminders about duties and obligations, they directed their migrant adult-children to stay in touch, and maintain their duties and obligations. For instance, upon learning that his nineteen-year old son had decided to leave the steady work in the mines of Michel, British Columbia, and venture to Montreal, Gianlorenzo Colonello’s father reacted as follows:

Gianlorenzo, as we read your letter, both your *mamma* and I, we were on the verge of tears while reading the words in which you say that you are young and that you want to enjoy yourself. We thought that you went to Canada to make some money for yourself, some savings for another day. Isn’t that so? It’s fine to enjoy yourself a little bit, but moderately, don’t you think so? You’re in a foreign land, and it’s always good to have some money on you. Another thing, when you answer our letters, read them carefully and think over the words we’re telling you... Listen to us, you’re young, and if you’re earning good money, hold on to it, because money does not come easily: Look at Silvio of your *Zio* Mario. He lives in Belgium, is now married and this year he bought some land on which he will be building his house in Belgium... You tell us that, if you leave where you are now, you’ll be going to Montreal. You do what you think is best, because we just

¹⁰⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” *The Antioch Review* 50.1-2 (1992): 221-241 (Reprinted from *The Antioch Review* 33.1, 1975).

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 164.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson 219.

don't know. All I can tell you is that in the city you earn more, and you spend much more.... your *padre*, Luciano.¹¹⁰

In the same letter, Marianna expressed her disappointment about her son's desire to leave his aunt's home in Michel. She wrote:

Gianlorenzo, I am so disappointed to read the words you wrote in your letter... I had thought you would stay with your *zia* as long as you would be away. In that way, you could buy yourself a house, as you had written some time ago. That was really a good thing for you. But if you are thinking of changing place, think it over carefully. If you move to the city, you could end up without a job. You do what you think is best, but think it over a thousand times. Not I and nor your *padre* can say more than that. You have to do what you think is best for you. And, if you have a good job there, why are you changing now? You need to do what you think is best for you. Don't be angry over what we are telling you. Send us news right away, as both of us as your *genitori* as well as everyone else at home are always happy to hear from you... Gianlorenzo, take care of yourself. Don't get sick, because we need your help, and if you get sick, it's bad for you, and worse for us. Go see your *zia*, and listen to her advice. She is a good woman, and she is like a *mamma* to you. Ask her what you should do.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ "Gianlorenzo a leggere la tua lettera, quanto io e pure tua mamma ci veniva da piangere a sentire quelle parole che tu sei giovine e che ai da svagarti la vita nei divertimenti. Noi si credeva sempre che tu fossi andato in Canada per farti qualche cosa di risparmio per te, per un altro giorno, non ti pare? Va bene un poco divertirsi ma moderati non ti pare? Perché sei in terra straniera e i soldi stanno sempre bene. Poi quando tu rispondi sulle nostre lettere leggi bene e rifletta bene le parole, ... Se tu stai sui nostri insegnamenti, guarda che sei giovine e se guadagni tieni da conto i soldi che si fa fatica a prenderli. Guarda Silvio del zio Mario che si trova in Belgio, si è sposato e questanno si e comperato un pezzo di terreno e si fa la casa in Belgio... Tu dici che se vai via di dove sei vai a Montreale, ma pensa tu fai quello che ti pare perché noi non sappiamo, ma solo ti dico che in città guadagni di più e spendi tanto di più... tuo padre, Luciano." Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, July 28, 1954. Letter no. 21.

¹¹¹ "Gianlorenzo sono rimasta tanto dispiacente nel legere cio che mi ai scritto... io avrei creduto che tu stassi sempre con lei fino che avevi piacere a stare via e così potevi comperarti anche la casa come un tempo avanti avevi scritto quella era proprio una bella cosa per te, ma se ai intensione da cambiare guarda e pensa bene perché andare in città forse potresti rimanere anche disocupato e così fai tu per la melio e prima da partire pensa tante volte io e ne tuo padre non potiamo dire di più perché ai da fare tu quello che ti va piu bene, e se ai lavoro li e un bel lavoro perché cambi ora ai da fare te come ti va bene melio, non arabiarti cio che ti abbiamo scritto anzi darci subito risposta perché a noi genitori e tutti di casa si a piacere a ricevere spesso....Gianlorenzo guarda da tenerti daconto di non amalarti perché noi abbiamo bisogno del tuo aiuto e se tu si male male per te e peggio per noi, vai dalla zia e ascolta i suoi insegnamenti e lei e una cara donna e come una mamma per te. Domandali consilio alla zia come ai da fare." Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, July 28, 1954. Letter no. 21.

By reminding their son of his initial objectives, both parents were urging him to stay true to his “migration project.”¹¹² Moreover, by referring to the migrant success stories of other kin they emphasized the benefits of listening to their words. In addition, by reminding him of how much they depended on him financially, they underscored his responsibilities to them.

This latter point raises our awareness of the level of interdependence that linked kin in transnational households. As Johnson argues, interdependence in Italian-American families “is associated with the patterning of affection and authority.”¹¹³ The parental authority being exerted here through explicit interdependence in migration, is also an example of the potential for coercion that operated in transnational households.

The following words expressed by Gianlorenzo’s parents also show the kind of effort that was required to negotiate and compress physical, temporal and emotional distances that characterized transnational, interdependent relationships. In the letters that follow, Gianlorenzo’s parents continued to voice their authority by insisting: “I only tell you one thing, to make something of it now that you are young. Don’t go after cars, and don’t get sick while you’re away in a foreign land. It’s always good to have some money in your pocket. Don’t you think so?”¹¹⁴ Moreover, by expressing their economic

¹¹² The expression “migration project,” is borrowed from Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move* (1991) and it refers to a strategy or purpose conceived by the migrant and his or her kin carried through to completion for the benefit of family members involved in the migration experience whether as migrants or as those who remained behind.

¹¹³ Johnson 206.

¹¹⁴ “Solo ti dico tieni da conto i soldi di farti qualche cosa adesso che sei giovine, e di non andar dietro macchine, e poi anche ad a malarsi ed essere fuori all’estero in terra straniera e sempre bello ad avere i soldi in tasca, non ti pare?” Letter from Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 18, 1954. Letter no. 20.

difficulties and making their dependence on him known, they added considerable weight to their argument. The following words of Marianna are a case in point:

Gianlorenzo, I'd like to ask you a favour. Only if you can. I would need to buy myself a coat, but I don't have the money. If you could send it to me, otherwise, it's okay. The season is starting to cool down and it's good to stay warm, but if you can't send it to me, I won't buy anything. Coats are very expensive, and I'll just make do. I would also like to buy one for Gina, but if you can't, that's okay. I send you my dearest *saluti, baci... mamma*.¹¹⁵

In her study of Italian-American families, Johnson concludes that interdependence, nurturance and social control underlie children's conformity to parental expectations.¹¹⁶ The letters received by Maddalena Franchi illustrate the point by reminding us how much her experiences were tied up with the fortunes of the family. This included making her migration experience a happy, fulfilling and successful event, both socially, personally and emotionally in order for her happiness to radiate throughout the network of immediate and extended kin. From the first letter that Daniela Perini wrote to her daughter, the seemingly benevolent words of advice, encouragement and maternal love translate also into duty, obligation, social respectability and emotional pressures for a "good"¹¹⁷ daughter to respond to, and enact:

¹¹⁵ "Gianlorenzo vorrei pregarti un favore ma se puoi io avrei di comperarmi il palto ma mi manca i soldi così se tu puoi mandarmeli e sino pasienza perche la stagione comincia a rinfrescare e così e melio tenersi coperti ma se non puoi mandarmi allora non prendo niente perche sono molto costosi io faro per la melio e avrei piacere a prendere uno anche per la Gina ma se non si puoi niente ti mando i miei cari saluti baci... mamma." Letter from Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 18, 1954. Letter no. 20.

¹¹⁶ Johnson 219.

¹¹⁷ I examine this concept and the related excerpt more closely in the next chapter on gender relations and dynamics.

Carissima figlia, I received your *cara* letter and you have no idea how happy I was to hear such good news from you, for since you left, I did nothing else but think of you and cry. Now, I am comforted and pleased to learn from your letter of the pleasant trip you had, and the warm welcome you received from your parents.... I pray to the Lord that He give me the good fortune to hold you in my arms again. I will never stop praying for you, for your *marito*, and the whole *famiglia* there, as well as for your happiness, good fortune and good health. I urge you to write to your *zii* at least one letter for the first time, followed by postcards. *Cara figlia*, perhaps you forgot to send your *saluti* to our dear ones in our building, but I gave them just the same, because everyone here asks of you. I ask you to be good and kind like you have been with your *madre*, and to respect your *genitori*, and to love your *marito*, because happiness in life comes only through loving each other.¹¹⁸

Another point that deserves attention here are the pervasive requests by correspondents on both sides of the Atlantic to keep writing. The desire to stay in touch extended beyond the mutual desire of correspondents to know in a few lines if family members were well or not. It also signified an urge to make kin part of their daily lives despite their physical absence. Ironically, by sharing knowledge about themselves and their families some correspondents left themselves open to criticism from family members who had previously exercised authority over them. Often enough, therefore, one finds mixed together with the well-meaning words of advice and encouragement, a different language of proscription and authority as expressed through sermons, reprimands, or other reminders of discipline and control.

¹¹⁸ “*Carissima figlia, ho ricevuto la tua cara lettera e non sai quanta gioia ho provato nel sentire le belle notizie che mi hai dato, poiché da quando sei partita non ho fatto altro che piangere e pensare a te. Ora sono tranquilla e contenta nell'apprendere dalla tua lettera del viaggio tranquillo e della buona accoglienza da parte dei tuoi genitori... Io prego il Signore che mi dia la fortuna di poterti riabbracciare e non mi stancherò di pregare per te, tuo marito e tutta la famiglia, che vi dia felicità, tanta fortuna e salute. Ti raccomando di scrivere ai tuoi zii almeno per la prima volta una lettera e poi in seguito qualche cartolina. Cara figlia forse ti sarai dimenticata di mandare i saluti a questi del palazzo, ma io glieli ho dati lo stesso perché tutti mi domandano di te. Ti raccomando di essere buona e brava come sei stata con tua madre e di rispettare i tuoi genitori e di voler bene a tuo marito, perché nella vita l'unica felicità è volersi bene.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, November 22, 1960. Letter no. 180.

The letters also illustrate what happened when a correspondents' desire to know more about the responding correspondent was not fulfilled or when the messages being delivered were perceived to be unclear. For instance, in a letter by Gianlorenzo's father, we read his reaction to his son's news that he is no longer living with his aunt in Michel, British Columbia:

We were so surprised that you are no longer living with your *zia*, and that they told you that they are old, and wish to be alone. Did you show any disrespect towards them? Why don't you explain yourself better? When you write, do you always have so little to say? ... We are very worried about this, write to us immediately the reason, because we want to know...¹¹⁹

The letters that followed in the series indicate that Gianlorenzo did report to his parents' satisfaction the events unfolding in his aunt's household in Michel, for at that point, the issue was no longer a concern and their correspondence had shifted toward providing advice and encouragements relating to his move to Montreal.

Maddalena's correspondence also suggests that she fulfilled her duties and obligations as a "good" daughter, because the requests to keep writing or to write more often were predominantly directed to encouraging her to write to extended family members. For instance, soon after Maddalena's arrival in Montreal, Daniela Perini once again reminded her daughter to write to kin: "I beg you to write a couple of postcards to

¹¹⁹ "Noi siamo stati tanto meravigliati che non sei più con la zia, e che ti hanno detto che loro sono vecchi e che hanno piacere a stare soli, forse gli hai mancato di rispetto verso loro? Perché non ti spieghi più bene, quando scrivi ai sempre così poco da dire? ... Noi siamo tanto in pensiero per questo scrivi subito il motivo che noi abbiamo piacere a sapere..." Letter from Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, July 9, 1954. Letter no. 49.

your *zii*, because they are always asking for you, since the postcards you sent them have not arrived yet.”¹²⁰ Daniela then proceeded to reassure Maddalena that:

you mustn't be afraid of writing to your *zii*, let me assure you that you write quite well, even Filomena in reading the letter that you wrote to Stefania was impressed to see how well written and structured your letter is. Therefore, try to write a first letter to them, and then follow up with a written note in your letters to me addressed to each of them...¹²¹

Here, an additional reason for Daniela's insistence that her daughter write to her uncles and aunts was to save face with her extended family in Italy. The irony is that while her younger brother later became a similar target of his mother's pleas, the expectations differed between daughter and son. In a letter written soon after his arrival in Montreal, Daniela advised her daughter: “*Carissima figlia*, I know that Fabio is a little lazy in writing to me. I beg you to tell him not to make me suffer with the mail... ”¹²² In this letter, Daniela also indicated to her that she did not expect Fabio to write often: “I'm not asking him to write every week, because I know that once he starts working, he'll have little free time available, but at least, if he could write once a month... ”¹²³

¹²⁰ “*ti prego di scrivere qualche cartolina ai tuoi zii, perché non fanno altro che domandarmi di te, dato che le cartoline che hai scritto non gli sono ancora arrivate.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, December 5, 1960. Letter no. 182.

¹²¹ “*non devi avere il timore di scrivere ai tuoi zii poiché scrivi abbastanza bene, dato che anche Filomena nel leggere la lettera che hai scritto a Stefania è rimasta meravigliata perché era scritta e composta bene. Perciò cerca di scrivergli una lettera per la prima volta ed in seguito metterai qualche biglietto nelle lettere che mi scriverai indirizzandoli ora ad uno ed ora a un altro.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, December 5, 1960. Letter no. 182.

¹²² “*Carissima figlia, so che Fabio per scrivere è un pò pigro quindi prego te di dirgli di non farmi stare in pena con la posta...* ” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi and Fabio Franchi, n.d. 1966. Letter no. 227.

¹²³ “*non dico di scrivere tutte le settimane, perché so che quando incomincerà a lavorare avrà poco tempo libero, ma almeno di scrivere una volta al mese...* ” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi and Fabio Franchi, n.d. 1966. Letter no. 227.

To be sure, the frequency and intensity of the flow of correspondence between mother and daughter was astounding when compared with the infrequent letters her brother was expected to write. Can this disparity be attributed to gender norms? I'm suggesting that the gender dynamic is inherently part of the answer. Indeed, if we carefully compare the exchanges between Gianlorenzo and his parents with the dialogues exchanged between a mother and daughter in Maddalena's letters, the gender dynamic is inescapable. The greater obligation for daughters to write, as opposed to sons, illustrates another difference in the kinds of duties, obligations, and emotional pressures that kinship induced, sustained and exacerbated in correspondence of migration.

In the letters exchanged between women and men in a transnational love relationship, forms of control and discipline are also observed through the kinds of advice and encouragement that was given. In his first letters to Ester di Leonardi, for instance, Giordano Rossini responded to the possible threat of disruption that her migration could eventually cause in their relationship, as he wrote:

Amore mio (My love), you must return—so much so that the other day, I threw a coin in the *Fontana di Trevi*. As you can see, I'm always thinking of you. Tell me what you've seen, what you're doing. Are you enjoying yourself? Write to me, tell me everything. I feel so alone, and I miss you terribly. I cannot live without you. Don't leave me!!!...
Rispondi a tutto ciò che ti domando (Reply to everything I ask you).¹²⁴

Moreover, as Giordano prepared to close his letter, he advised her, "*Amore mio*, love me *sempre* (forever) and one day you'll see that your perseverance will be crowned by complete happiness. Don't let yourself be convinced by... Maria Luisa. I get shivers just

¹²⁴ "*Amore mio tu devi tornare—tanto più che l'altro giorno ho gettato per te un soldo nella fontana di Trevi, come vedi penso sempre a te; raccontami quello che hai visto, quello che hai fatto, ti sei divertita? Scrivimi, raccontami tutto, mi sento tanto solo, tu mi manchi tanto, non posso vivere senza di te, non mi lasciare!!! ... rispondi a tutto ciò che ti domando.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

thinking of the possibility that you could change your mind. Remember this, ‘no one will ever love you *come ti amo io* (like I love you).’ ”¹²⁵ Three months into the love correspondence, Giordano learned from Ester that sometimes she found herself surrounded by other men. In response, Giordano proceeded to advise her that men cannot be trusted, and suggested ways for her to deal with other men encircling her. He wrote:

Amore mio, with regards to those who surround you, try to ignore them. If you can, avoid them altogether. I think it’s pointless for me to advise you. I’m certain you know exactly what you need to do. By now, you are a girl who knows about life, and who will not let herself fall prey to the first man she meets. I tell you this because I am so afraid of losing you one day. It’s not because I’m not convinced of your love. It’s *il destino* (fate) that worries me because it’s so cruel. I can expect any of its dirty tricks from one moment to the next. We just can’t trust it! That’s why, *cara Ester*, let’s try to break free from the temptations, flatteries and promises, as these can be trappings of *il destino*. I don’t want to bore you with this small talk, I’m just begging you to be careful!! Don’t trust men!!!¹²⁶

Discipline in the form of gentle reprimands and requests to keep writing were also voiced in the love letters exchanged between Dante del Moro and his wife Sara. These findings are witnessed in their correspondence written in both Italy and Canada. For instance, following a long interval of silence on Dante’s part, Sara wrote sarcastically about his silence: “Today I received not one, but two of your letters, and I see that you

¹²⁵ “*Amore, amami sempre e vedrai che un giorno questa tua perseveranza sarà coronata da una grande felicità; non farti convincere dalla... Maria Luisa, al solo pensiero che tu possa cambiare idea mi vengono i brividi, ricordati di questo, ‘nessuno ti amerà mai così come ti amo io.’*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

¹²⁶ “*Amore mio, inquanto a quelli che ti gironzolano intorno, cerca di non dargli retta, se puoi evitagli il più possibile; ma credo superfluo il consigliarti, poiché saprai benissimo cosa devi fare, sei ormai una ragazza che conosce la vita e che non si fa incantare dal primo che incontra, ti dico tutto questo perché ho tanta paura di poterti perdere un giorno, non è che non sono convinto del tuo amore, ma è il destino che mi preoccupa, perché è talmente schifoso, che mi devo aspettare sì un colpo mancino da un momento all'altro; non ci si può dare affidamento! perciò cara Ester, cerchiamo di sfuggire alle tentazioni e alle lusinghe e promesse perché possono essere trappole tese dal destino, ma ora non voglio annoiarti con queste chiacchiere, voglio solo pregarti di stare attenta!! non ti fidare degli uomini!!!*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, June 9, 1957. Letter no. 387.

have not forgotten these poor souls who live just to hear from their beloved *marito*. Even Paolo and Elisabetta ask every day, ‘did we receive any mail from *papà*?’¹²⁷

Conversely, when Dante hadn’t heard from Sara in what seemed to him a long time, reprimands were also in order. In the following, Dante searched for reasons for Sara’s silence, and in the process, he emphasized the importance of her letters to him:

Cara moglie, Since your last letter that I received this past Monday, to which I answered right away, I haven’t received any other news from you. I don’t know why, and I hope everything is fine. I’m in good health, as I wholeheartedly hope the same is for you, *miei cari* (my dear ones). I’m still wondering why you’re not writing to me at least once a week. I don’t think it’s because you don’t have time, it seems to me. I know that you are constantly preoccupied with the children and meeting their needs. However, with a little sacrifice you should think that you also have another little one here, whose needs also wait to be satisfied. *Mia cara*, you must think that despite my good fortune in being here with the cousins, I have no other gratification. I beg you then, try, if you can and want to, send me news more often. Even if they’re just two lines, they will be enough for me to feel encouraged and to keep going. It’s not that I’m feeling discouraged. But, you know, to hear you say that you are fine is enough to keep my spirits up...¹²⁸

In another instance Dante responded to Sara’s lapse in writing with a different kind of reproach: “*mia cara*, not even in this letter did you tell me if you received the money. I don’t know why that is. You remember to ask me for it, but somehow forget about letting

¹²⁷ “oggi ho ricevuto non una ma due tue lettere vedo che non ti sei dimenticato di questa povera gente che vive per aspettar notizie dal suo amato marito, anche Paolo e Elisabetta ogni giorno domandano e arrivato posta da papà” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 6, 1956. Letter no. 89.

¹²⁸ “*Cara moglie* Dopo la tua ultima ricevuta lunedì scorso, alla quale ti ho risposto subito, non hò più avuto tue notizie, non so perché, e spero non ci siano malore; La mia salute prosegue bene, così spero di cuore sia per voi miei cari, Torno a dire, non sò il perché non scrivi neanche una volta alla settimana, non sarà il tempo che ti manca, credo, è vero che avrai la preoccupazione continua di guardare i piccolo in tutti i suoi bisogni, mà con un pò di sacrificio dovresti pensare che oltre a loro, ne hai un’altro piccolo, ‘da accontentare’ Mia cara devi pensare che nonostante la fortuna di essere qui con i cugini, non ho nessuna soddisfazione fuori di quella, dunque ti prego, cerca se puoi e se vuoi, di farmi avere tue nuove più spesso, mi accontento solo di due righe, non importa come sono scritte ma saranno sufficienti per darmi coraggio, non che mi manchi per questo, ma sai, solo che tu mi dica, stiamo bene, è abbastanza per tenermi sollevato il morale... .” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 2, 1956. Letter no. 137.

me know once you've received it. Not for nothing, but you need to understand, that I'm here in total darkness of everything that's going on. Therefore, try to be a little more understanding....”¹²⁹

Briefly, as my discussion demonstrates, the threads of control, authority and discipline in the letters exchanged between parents and children, as well as between lovers, were interwoven with the dialogues of love and care that flowed between kin across borders. The discussion points both to negotiation and reaching-out efforts, but also to subtle forms of coercion and the exercise of authority. As this analysis shows, lines of kinship were clearly demarcated in migration correspondence. Encouragements to stay the course and stay in touch in light of the enormous physical distances separating kin were part of the dialogic exchange of the letters.

Conclusion

Kinship played a central role in the lives of postwar Italian migrants to Canada and their families and loved ones. Based on the evidence of the letters from six kin networks, it is possible to observe how networks of kinship operated and deployed their resources both to support and control members across continents and oceans. Letters transmitted news and information blended with advice, solace, encouragement, expressions of love and reminders of duties and obligations. But their social and cultural meaning was also often enriched by the inclusion of gifts or the personal impact of a chosen courier. Furthermore, as the letters overwhelmingly suggest, the personal happiness of the

¹²⁹ “*mia cara manche in questa tua mi hai detto se hai ricevuto i soldi. Non sò come sia. Ti ricordi di domandarli e ti dimentichi quando li ricevi. Non per nessuna cosa, ma devi pur capire che io stando qui sono sempre all'oscuro di tutto, perciò cerca di esere un pò diligente...*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 28, 1956. Letter no. 165.

correspondents was linked to familial happiness in the kinship networks. The happiness of family members was seen as achievable through the fulfillment of their kin roles, obligations, and norms that were understood as “normal” in their social and personal universes. How well these actors fulfilled their roles as mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, godmothers, and godfathers across the networks was seen as proof of their bond, their love and affection, and their filial loyalty. Moreover, as this chapter demonstrates, letters played a vital and necessary role in reinforcing kinship values and the ideology of family, despite the ruptures of migration.

Chapter Three: “My dear, you will have nothing else to do but...”¹ Gender Relations and Dynamics

*Mia cara, ...I hope you will be happy here and thankful,
...Think that all you need to do are the groceries, bring the little
ones to the nursery school, and everything else. You'll see that this
is more useful than reading the magazines Grand Hotel and Intimità...
Think only that while I'll be at work, you will have nothing
else to do but prepare the meals, the best you can, and patiently
wait for the return of your loved ones to gather at the daily table.*²

Introduction

In 2006, the *International Migration Review* published a series of multidisciplinary articles assessing the state of the literature that has burgeoned in recent decades on gender and migration.³ These articles trace the development of related studies that progressed from neglecting to “see” gender as fundamental to human activity to acknowledging the

¹ “Mia cara, non hai altro da fare che...” Excerpt from letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

² “Mia cara, ... spero ti troverai contenta mi ringrazierai, se solo pensi che devi arrangiarti di fare la spesa, di portare i piccoli o all'asilo o alla scuola, e poi tutto il resto, vedrai che questo è più utile che non il Grand Hotel ed Intimità... pensa solo che io sono al lavoro, e tu non hai da far altro che far da mangiare, il meglio possibile, ed attendere con pazienza il ritorno dei tuoi cari per il desco quotidiano.” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

³ The articles included in this special issue of the *International Migration Review* 40.1 (Spring 2006) are: Katharine M. Donato, Donna Gabaccia, Jennifer Holdaway, Martin Manalansan IV, and Patricia R. Pessar, “A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies”; Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar, “Gender Matters: Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery toward the Core of Migration Studies”; Suzanne M. Sinke, “Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives”; Rachel Silvey, “Geographies of Gender and Migration: Spatializing Social Difference”; Nicola Piper, “Gendering the Politics of Migration”; Carola Suarez-Orozco, Desiree Baolian Qin, “Gendered Perspectives in Psychology: Immigrant Origin Youth”; Kitty Calavita, “Gender, Migration, and Law: Crossing Borders and Bridging Disciplines”; Sara R. Curran, Steven Shafer, Katharine M. Donato, Filiz Garip, “Mapping Gender and Migration in Sociological Scholarship: Is it Segregation or Integration?”; and Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies.”

multi-faceted dynamics of gender as key mechanisms for determining how migration was differentially experienced by women and men. If, as Joan Scott suggests, “seeing is the origin of knowing,”⁴ the scholars participating in the working group of “Gender and Migration Theory” (Social Science and Research Council) through the initiative of historian Donna Gabaccia, determined that migration and gender are inexorably interconnected. They concluded that while the state of the field of the past two decades was relatively healthy, a number of challenges in further identifying and dislodging the moorings of gender in migration remained.

In short, they rightly argue that, “future scholarship must take seriously the insistence of gender theorists that gender structures all human relationships and all human activities.”⁵ In order to penetrate the pervasive nature of gender in human activities, specifically pertaining to migration and its multiple chronological and spatial fields, scholars on gender and migration argue that future research must be grounded in methodological diversity and interdisciplinary dialogue so as to effectively “see gender at work.”⁶ My analysis of the private correspondence arising from postwar migration endeavours to contribute to this research initiative.

Recent studies that have examined the intersections of migration and correspondence,⁷ namely Gerber (2006), Gerber, Elliott, Sinke (2006); and Frenette, Marcel and Willis (2006) have neglected to point to the intersecting, multi-layered, and

⁴ Joan W. Scott, “‘Experience’,” *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 24.

⁵ Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan IV, and Pessar 21.

⁶ Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan IV, and Pessar 22.

⁷ In the term “correspondence,” I include private letters in the traditional sense as well as communication via the internet.

shifting gender dynamics that operate on a micro-level in the writings between migrants and loved ones. Feminist anthropologist Nicole Constable's study, *Romance on a Global Stage* (2003) is an exception. In addition to looking at the wider historical and political-economic context of relationships developed through correspondence, courtship and marriage between Chinese and Filipino women and U.S. men, Constable's analysis focuses on the views and experiences of these women and men "who are contemplating correspondence, in the process of correspondence, recently married, or about to be reunited."⁸ More specifically, her study explores questions about gender and power in correspondence courtship and marriage.⁹ It provides a "critical rereading of correspondence relationships that illustrates how they are situated in relation to history and political economy, without robbing people of their individuality, emotion, or sense of personhood."¹⁰ Feminist anthropologist Rhacel Parrenas's work (2001, 2005) has also provided a model for analysis. She examines how gender works across transnational spaces (affecting individuals, families or households who migrated and remained behind) and the emotions that are experienced differentially by women, men and children in transnational households and labour across global spaces. While Parrenas's analyses do not draw from private letters, they are based on anthropological fieldwork and thus are grounded in the gendered voices of individuals caught in the throes of migration.

The letters I have examined also reveal a highly gendered universe. As Iacovetta observes, the migration movement from Italy to Canada during the second postwar period

⁸ Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* 8.

⁹ Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* 4.

¹⁰ Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* 225.

was characteristically family-based in that women and children either travelled together with their husbands and/or fathers, or joined them later once the husband or father had settled with a steady job and found lodging for them.¹¹ In this chapter, I show how gender and migration were closely interwoven in the personal correspondence and the transnational lives of the women and men who wrote the letters. I argue that gender norms and gender roles were not only reified, but also reinforced by the letter-writers, and subsequently, re-inscribed in a rigid division of transnational labour that was perpetuated by both women and men in the kinship network and personal worlds of the writers themselves. The gendered norms and behaviours of the actors that I examine in this analysis were rooted in the ways these letter-writers experienced the woes and fruits of migration, both directly and indirectly. My study crystallizes how gender works both discursively and prescriptively in the mental universes of transatlantic migrants in the postwar period.

More to the point, this in-depth analysis examines the inner, subjective workings of gender that flowed through the private letters of both working-class, urban and rural-based women and men across social fields between Italy and Canada. As Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar argue, “the people initiating, and receiving these flows [of material objects, including remittances] are not situated equally within the gendered geography of power, and the flows both illustrate and reproduce these disparities.”¹² My analysis zooms in on the gender behaviour and attitudes of the letters-writers who were living a transnational existence. These *pensieri* (thoughts and concerns)—which orbited around

¹¹ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* 47-48 and 80.

¹² Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar, “Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces,” *Identities* 7.4 (2001): 450.

the pain of separation, fears of the unknown, worries over loved ones, longings for reunification, hopes for the future, joys at being reunited with loved ones, and desires for the completion of the migration project—were inevitably shaped by normative gender behaviours and attitudes.

In the discussion, I show how the productive and reproductive gender roles that existed within the postwar kin context were prescribed, negotiated and reinforced by letters which served as the crucial form of transatlantic communication. The study's focus on the productive and reproductive spheres is influenced largely by feminist literature and the claim made by Joan Scott that "the 'origins' of patriarchy are located" within the family and kinship systems.¹³

This chapter is divided in two parts: one deals with the world of work and the images and ideologies of masculinities and femininities in the workplace; the other explores the domestic sphere of social reproduction and the recurring images of the imperial, yet supportive role played by Italian mothers from 1946 to 1971. According to Candace West and Don Zimmerman "Gender is a powerful ideological device, which produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category."¹⁴ Indeed, as sociologist Judith Lorber argues:

Gender is a human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways. Gender organizes social relations in everyday life as well as in the major social structures, such as social class and the hierarchies of bureaucratic organizations. The gendered microstructure and the gendered macrostructure reproduce and reinforce each other.

¹³ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. Revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 86.

¹⁴ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *The Social Construction of Gender*, eds. Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991) 34.

The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power.¹⁵

Moreover, as Lorber suggests, while “Gender has changed in the past and will change in the future,... without deliberate restructuring,” and, deliberate deconstructing, “it will not necessarily change in the direction of greater equality between women and men.”¹⁶

A) The World of Work

Work in the textile and garment manufacturing factories in cities like Montreal during the postwar years was physically and mentally demanding for women like Clara Montorio. For thousands of Italian immigrant women who arrived in Canada during the postwar period, wage labor entailed long hours of back-bending work under dire conditions that included speed-ups, close supervision, dust, and foul-smelling fumes.¹⁷ Not long after arriving in Montreal, Clara joined the throngs of Italian women in the garment manufacturing industry, and described to her future husband, Maurizio, how discouraged she felt about working in the factory as she persevered, nonetheless, in her attempt to look for a better way to handle the work. On October 8, 1948, she wrote:

Since Tuesday, I’ve been working in this large workshop..., I was hoping to continue working happily... to deserve the praises of my

¹⁵ Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) 6.

¹⁶ Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* 6.

¹⁷ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* 96.

department supervisor, a French woman. I wanted to work, I wanted to succeed at it because I felt I was doing something for our future happiness. But I can't... the work is too demanding for me, and I'm not that strong, I had to stay all day continuously sitting at the sewing machine without a minute's break... I feel discouraged, but what can I do? I was hoping to get used to the deafening noise of the machines, to the assiduous work, but I come home every day more tired than ever. Tonight my *papà* scolded me for not quitting my *lavoro* (job), but really, I can't take it anymore. Maybe it would be better if I worked at home with *mamma*. Tomorrow *papà* will buy me a sewing machine so I can start working from home.¹⁸

Work in the garment manufacturing industry itself was hard work, but for a young Italian woman who had recently arrived from a small town in northeastern Italy, managing the cold winter temperatures in the enormous foreign spaces of a Canadian metropolis contributed to the difficulties she faced. For Clara, it resulted in fatigue, leaving little desire for anything but rest at the end of the day. In the following excerpt, Clara described to Maurizio her daily drudgeries of going to work while recounting how her dream of a future life with Maurizio helped her to:

forget this insignificant and boring life I lead every day and so, *mio adorato*, (my adored one) don't think that it's an exciting life. I need to be at work at 8 o'clock in the morning. So, I wake up at 7, sometimes even earlier, since it takes me over half an hour by tram to reach the factory. The streets are impossible to walk on. They are covered with ice and snow. Now, I leave it up to you to imagine how tired I am at night and how much I feel like going out to enjoy myself.¹⁹

¹⁸ "da martedì lavoro in un laboratorio grande..., speravo di poter riuscire a lavorare contenta... da meritarmi gli elogi della capo reparto, una francese, volevo fare, volevo riuscire perché mi sembrava di fare già qualche cosa per la nostra felicità futura, ma non posso... è un lavoro troppo stridente per me che non sono tanto forte, dovevo stare tutto il giorno seduta a macchina e cucire continuamente senza un minuto di tregua, sono... sfiduciata, ma che fare? Speravo di potermi abituare al rumore assordante delle macchine, all'assiduo lavoro, ma torno a casa sempre più stanca, questa sera ho sentito una sgridata da mio papà appunto perché non voglio abbandonare il lavoro, ma non ne posso più, forse è meglio che lavori a casa assieme alla mamma, domani il papà andrà a comperare la macchina da cucire e così potrò incominciare." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, October 8, 1948. Letter no. 314.

¹⁹ "di dimenticare la vita insignificante e noiosa che giornalmente trascoro e così mio adorato, non credere che sia tanto divertente, la mattina alle 8 devo trovarmi sul lavoro, sicché devo alzarmi alle 7 ed anche prima perché quasi sempre mi vuole 1/2 ora di tram per arrivare in fattoria le strade sono impraticabili, ghiaccio e neve. Ora lascio a dire a te quanto sono stanca la sera e quanta voglia abbia di andare in

As a single woman aspiring to marry soon, Clara felt impelled to work and earn a wage that would allow her to contribute financially to the realization of her future life with Maurizio. Yet, implicit in her correspondence was the implication that once she became married she would no longer have to do the kind of waged work in which thousands of married Italian immigrant women were engaged. Despite the fact that women's wages were often necessary to meet household needs, their work was seen as complementary to a husband's "breadwinner's" wage and temporary.

Although many women were engaged in working outside their domestic roles in postwar Italy and Canada, the prevailing image that their income only supplemented what the male heads of households provided suggests that, despite their contribution to the work force, women continued to be identified as belonging to the domestic sphere. The secondary status of Italian women's wage work stemmed, according to Elson and Pearson, from "women's role in the family" as caregiver of children, men and the elderly.²⁰ A woman's secondary status was further reinforced by the lower wages women's work brought to the household. Indeed, as a single woman living with her parents, Clara's wage work in the garment industry was viewed as entirely supplementary to her family's needs which perhaps explains why her father was unhappy that she was tiring herself out rather than staying home with her mother. Yet Clara persisted and

qualche posto e divertirmi." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, February 1, 1949. Letter no. 312.

²⁰ Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, "The Subordination of Women and the Internationalisation of Factory Production," *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*, eds. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh (London: CSE Books, 1981) 154. See also Olivia Harris, "Households as Natural Units," *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*, eds. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh (London: CSE Books, 1981) 49-68; Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. Revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," *Signs* 1.3 (Spring 1976): 137-169.

continued to work in the factory. She managed to renegotiate her salary, and despite her father's opposition, went back to work:

la padrona della fattoria (the factory's owner or forewoman) called me several times to tell me that she has found a girl who is willing and hard-working. I caught the fish by the hook and do you know what I did? (It's obvious she needed me). I asked her for a raise, so that now I make 6 dollars more per week, I'll let some time pass, and then I'll ask for another raise. Otherwise, I'll change jobs. Here, there are lots of jobs available. There's something for everyone. I'm sure she won't fire me, she needs me too much. So, before I was paid 45 cents per hour, now, I'm paid 55 cents. It's good, no? And if you come down, I'm willing to keep working. Here we work, but we also get lots of satisfaction from our work.²¹

While Clara Montorio's occupation and income were viewed as supplementary by her parents, to her, work was important because it brought significant personal satisfaction as well as economic gain. It also empowered her with the understanding that she was contributing financially to her forthcoming life with Maurizio. Her vision of her married life with Maurizio included wage-work, as she wrote in a letter to him: "And if you come down, I'm willing to keep working." These few words reveal her awareness that as a married woman, wage work was optional and could be suspended. Nonetheless, she insisted that she would be happy to contribute to the household income even as a married woman.

The concept of women's work and wages as supplementary was reiterated also in Giordano Rossini's letters to Ester di Leonardi. Giordano's correspondence stems from a love relationship *à distance* that he shared with Ester who in March 1957 emigrated with

²¹ *"la padrona della fattoria mi ha telefonato diverse volte perché dice che ha trovato una ragazza volenterosa ed assidua, io ho addescato la pesca all'amo e sai che ho fatto? (Lei si vede che aveva bisogno di me). Ho chiesto l'aumento, così ora mi dà 6 dollari di più per settimana, ne lascio passare un'altro periodo e poi di nuovo replico la faccenda, se mi riesce bene, altrimenti cambio posto, qui non manca il lavoro, ce n'è per tutti, ma sono sicura che non mi manderà via troppo le sono utile. Così prima prendevo 45 centesimi all'ora, ora 55, bene così vero? E se vieni tu, sono disposta a lavorare ancora, qui si lavora ma si ha anche soddisfazione."* Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, February 1, 1949. Letter no. 312.

her sister and brothers to Montreal. In order for Ester to return to Rome where Giordano lived, Giordano needed to find a regular, well-paying job that enabled him to provide for her as a married woman. Responding to Ester's description of her daily work in the textile factories, Giordano, while sympathetic to the fatigue caused by her work, viewed her experience as little more than an "extra" to her capabilities as a woman. Certainly, he did not view wage-work for her as a measure of self-fulfillment, nor as a fundamental component of their lives together as a married couple. We witness this in Giordano's letter to Ester on May 31, 1957: "learn the art, and put it aside. So, when we'll be married, you'll have something else to do... ." ²² The expression, "*una cosa in più*" (something else to do) is suggestive that Ester's wage work was in fact, viewed as secondary. In the household envisioned by Giordano, he would be provider and breadwinner, and she would be nurturer, confined to the reproductive sphere.

So, what was a man to think when he received some money from his working "girl" in Canada? In Giordano's case, the money Ester sent was a small token of generosity, a kind gesture seen by him as pampering her beloved. In no way did he view it as a form of economic empowerment for Ester. His vision of married life with Ester took for granted his role as the main, if not the only, wage-earner in the household. The fact that he was not yet able to provide for her economically (or that he was not *sistemato*) before she left for Canada, was the reason, he believed, they were now apart. However, instead of encouraging Ester to put some money aside for their future together, he believed the onus to provide for their family was left completely to him and that it was impossible to get married until he had steady employment. When Ester sent him a dollar in the mail, he

²² "*impara l'arte e mettila da parte, così quando saremo sposati saprai fare una cosa in più... .*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 31, 1957. Letter no. 384.

replied: “*Cara Ester*, when I returned home this evening, I found your letter of the 15/4 in which there was the dollar for me. *Caro Amore* (Dear love), only a heart in love could send this *pensiero*. And so, I thank you wholeheartedly, *grazie Amore*, but as a *buona moglie* (good wife), you shouldn’t spoil your *marito* (even if he is your future *marito*)... .”²³

While a large percentage of Italian women in Canada was gainfully employed in the 1950s and 1960s,²⁴ Italian women continued to identify themselves (and be identified by others) primarily according to their reproductive roles. As Maila Stivens observes, kinship is central to social reproduction and relegates women to domestic units.²⁵ By valorizing women’s contribution to domesticity and reproduction over wage-earning Italian kin contributed to women’s subordination. The more women relegated themselves to the domestic and reproductive sphere, the more important their husbands’ breadwinning capacities became. Ironically, as Stivens points out, women’s solidarity in kinship played a contradictory role in this asymmetrical balance of power. As I show in the discussion that follows, while kinship provided logistic and emotional support for women to improve their position, it also encouraged the sustaining of “ideological

²³ “*Cara Ester, quando sono tornato questa sera ho trovato la tua lettera del 15/4 nella quale c’era il dollaro, Caro Amore, solo un cuore innamorato poteva avere fatto questo pensiero, perciò ti ringrazio infinitamente, grazie Amore, ma come brava moglie non dovresti viziare il tuo marito (anche se futuro)... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 20, 1957. Letter no. 361.

²⁴ In her study on Italian postwar immigrants in Toronto, Iacovetta observes, “While working women accounted for more than one-third of the total Italian adult female population in Canada and Ontario in 1961, for Toronto this figure was 41.5 per cent. And these statistics do not cover the numerous women who earned money informally by taking in children or laundry, or by cleaning homes.” Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* 92-94.

²⁵ Maila Stivens, “Women, Kinship and Capitalist Development,” *Of Marriage and the Market: Women’s Subordination in International Perspective*, eds. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh (London: CSE Books, 1981) 114.

coherence of kin structures,” thereby, increasing women’s submission to male control.²⁶

By contrast, Italian migrant husbands’ roles as main breadwinners entitled them to social and economic power, and identified them as representatives of the family both in the public sphere and within the kinship network.

Significantly, for young women, like Clara and Ester living with their families, life in Canada—despite the physical exhaustion induced through work in the garment factories--also entailed opportunities for leisure and *libertà* (freedom). This included going to the movies, dance halls, attending language classes or going fishing, and visiting places. For Giordano, who read over and over again Ester’s letters and tried to make sense of the details of her descriptions of life in Canada, Ester was living a life of *libertà*: “I’m happy that you’re doing well. It must certainly be different from the life you lead here. I imagine that you have more free time, and *libertà* than here, and so, enjoy it to the utmost, because you don’t know what the future holds for you. Don’t forget that *una brava donna di casa* (a good home-maker or housewife) must know how to face unfavourable circumstances... .”²⁷ Giordano’s curiosity about her life in Canada was not easily appeased, as his inquiries into her new life deepened over time. In particular, his desire to know if she was indeed seeing anyone else persisted with questions like: “*Cara*, what did you do today? Did you work? Or did you go for a walk with a handsome Canadian? No!! I’m joking, I know perfectly well you wouldn’t do this wrong to me...Do

²⁶ Stivens 115.

²⁷ “*sono contento che ti trovi bene, sarà certamente una vita molto diversa da quella che facevi qua, avrai molto più svago, e libertà che non avevi qui, perciò divertiti più che puoi, perché non sai cosa ti preservi il futuro, ma non ti scordare che una brava donna di casa deve saper affrontare le circostanze sfavorevoli... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 30, 1957. Letter no. 412.

you know what I did? ... 'A LOUSY NOTHING.'"²⁸ We read his desolation and loneliness frequently in his letters, especially in his descriptions of days that amounted to "not much or nothing."²⁹ From his responses to her, we can assume that she provided a sparse description of her social life to him--beyond going to work, fishing or visiting touristic sites of Montreal. However, we can also speculate that an attractive young woman like Ester would have had abundant opportunities to socialize with friends (male and female), and to engage in leisure activities like dancing or going to the movies although it seems unlikely that she would reveal this side of her life to Giordano. In view of Giordano's description of his monotonous and lonely life, coupled with the enormous void he claimed to have experienced since her departure, it seems likely that Ester had a kind of "pacte épistolaire,"³⁰ with her lover, and kept from him any information that had the potential of causing hurt or confusion.

Despite the desire and enthusiasm of both Giordano and Ester, their relationship was not on solid ground, as it was based entirely on the thread of epistolary communication at the initial stages of a romantic relationship, when the couple was particularly vulnerable to doubts, fears, misunderstandings and confusion. Some of this unease is apparent in Giordano's uncertain reaction to the news that she was working outside her home:

Tesoro mio, I was already worried about you since I hadn't received any mail from you. I've been anxiously waiting for 17 long days for news from you. And finally, yesterday I received your letter of 12-

²⁸ "*cara, che cosa hai fatto oggi? hai lavorato? oppure sei stata a spasso con un bel Canadese? no!! scherzo so benissimo che non mi farai questo torto... sai che cosa ho fatto io?... 'SCHIFO'.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 25, 1957. Letter no. 364.

²⁹ "*sai che cosa ho fatto io?... 'SCHIFO'.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 25, 1957. Letter no. 364.

³⁰ Cécile Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pezzerat, D. Pouban. *Ces bonnes lettres: Une correspondance familiale au XIX siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1995) 131.

4/57, in which I learn that everything is proceeding normally. There's only one thing that surprises me, and that is, from what you are telling me, you don't work from home, but somewhere else. Where do you work? Can you tell me? Does Maria Luisa work there too? I am so happy to hear that you love me always so much. This is an enormous source of comfort for me. *Anch'io ti amo tanto!!* (I love you too so so much!!) I wish we were already married!! So that I wouldn't need to worry about losing you...³¹

One of Giordano's greatest fears was of losing Ester. Even though in nearly every letter he offered reassurances of love and devotion, in some letters we encounter a defensive response to the fact that she was now actively engaged in the productive (public) sphere. For instance, when Giordano learned that other men enjoyed her company, he offered her some "well-meaning" advice on how to keep the trappings of *il destino* (fate) and other men at bay—obviously so that *he* would not risk losing her. He wrote:

Amore mio, with regards to those who surround you, try to ignore them. If you can, avoid them altogether. I think it's pointless for me to advise you. I'm certain you know exactly what you need to do. By now, you are a girl who knows about life, and who will not let herself fall prey to the first man she meets. I tell you this because I am so afraid of losing you one day. It's not because I'm not convinced of your love. It's *il destino* (fate) that worries me because it's so cruel. I can expect any of its dirty tricks from one moment to the next. We just can't trust it! That's why, *cara Ester*, let's try to break free from the temptations, flatteries and promises, as these can be trappings of *il destino*. I don't want to bore you with this small talk, I'm just begging you to be careful!! Don't trust men!!!³²

³¹ "Tesoro mio già cominciavo a stare in pensiero per te, perché non arrivava la tua posta, erano 17 lunghi giorni che aspettavo con ansia tue notizie, e finalmente ieri mi è arrivata la tua del 12-4/57, nella quale apprendo che tutto procede normale, mi meraviglio di una cosa sola, cioè da quello che mi scrivi ho capito che non lavori a casa, bensì in qualche altro posto, dove lavori? me lo fai sapere? ci viene anche Maria Luisa ho constatato con immensa gioia che il tuo amore per me è sempre grande, questo mi consola molto, anch'io ti amo tanto!! Vorrei che fossimo già sposati!! così non avrei più paura di perderti... ." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 18, 1957. Letter no. 359.

³² "Amore mio, inquanto a quelli che ti gironzolano intorno, cerca di non dargli retta, se puoi evitagli il più possibile; ma credo superfluo il consigliarti, poiché saprai benissimo cosa devi fare, sei ormai una ragazza che conosce la vita e che non si fa incantare dal primo che incontra, ti dico tutto questo perché ho tanta

The two excerpts above illustrate two intersecting factors that contributed to Giordano's fears of losing Ester. The first element entails Giordano's perception of her work. The fact that Ester worked outside the home in an environment that was not strictly socially controlled by kinship or other women induced him to conclude that the possibility of other men courting Ester was not far-fetched (and the fact that she might have responded to these flatteries also did not escape him). Second, the fact that Ester exhibited freedom and agency³³ (perceived through descriptions of her new life in Canada, her work, her outings, and her gesture of sending him money), rested uneasily with him. Her new life in Canada did not reflect the image of a gentle, accommodating, submissive, domestic woman, but rather, of a woman who was empowered by her wage-earning capabilities, a woman who exercised free will in knowing what she wanted as she reached out for it. While Giordano himself admitted to being seduced by her personality, her determination and her agency during their time together in Italy, now that they were apart, those personality traits became a source of constant anxiety for Giordano. As a result, his letters not only contained words of devotion and longing, but also conveyed a rigid gender ideology of how he envisioned their life together. In these dreams, as we observe in the discussion that follows on reproduction and domesticity in transnational households, Ester would not work outside the confines of her domestic world, but would

paura di poterti perdere un giorno, non è che non sono convinto del tuo amore, ma è il destino che mi preoccupa, perché è talmente schifoso, che mi devo aspettare sì un colpo mancino da un momento all'altro; non ci si può dare affidamento! perciò cara Ester, cerchiamo di sfuggire alle tentazioni e alle lusinghe e promesse perché possono essere trappole tese dal destino, ma ora non voglio annoiarti con queste chiacchiere, voglio solo pregarti di stare attenta!! non ti fidare degli uomini!!!" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, June 9, 1957. Letter no. 387.

³³ As Joan Scott argues, "subjects have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them. Being a subject means being 'subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise.' These conditions enable choices, although they are not unlimited." Joan W. Scott, "Experience," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992) 34.

have babies and be waiting for her husband when he came home at the end of his work day.

A man's fear of losing *his* woman was also evoked in the letters of Dante to his wife, Sara. The next illustration shows how susceptible long distance relationships were to miscommunication especially when the only means of contact were infrequent letters. Indeed, jealousy could even be provoked between a husband and wife of many years. In the example which follows, all it took was a well-intentioned comment by Sara describing how good she felt about herself, and how positively the townsfolk looked on her appearance. In this case, the tensions that unfolded began innocently, with Sara's letter of August 6, 1956 describing their daughter's return to good health:

Your *padrona* (lady boss), think about it, weighs 60 kg, and is as fresh as when she got married. She even receives a few compliments (from the male sex). I tell you this to make you feel a little jealous, even though these comments make no difference to me. Especially, when I think that Paolo is nearly as tall as I am, and soon will be doing his First Communion, I feel old, but not for my old man...³⁴

The letter fueled a sarcastic "masculine" response from Dante:

Mia cara Signora, I'm pleased to hear about your weight, your youthful freshness, just like I can't help feeling flattered by the compliments you receive, and I hope there's something left over for the poor emigrant. I also need to ask you a favour, 'if you can,' when you'll have someone else, can you let me know? so that I too can make take a few steps forward... Forgive me, I too have gained some weight, not in terms of fat. My muscles are now like steel. So you think about it, instead of writing to me the letter that you wrote, it would be better if you told me in person, and then, what would happen?... I wonder if you'd be able to speak to me like this.³⁵

³⁴ "la tua Padrona pensa pesa 60 kg e venuta fresca come era prima di sposarsi e riceve anche qualche complimento (da sesso maschile) questo per ingelosirti un po ma non fanno ne caldo ne freddo se penso che Paolo e grande quasi al pari di me e presto farà la sua prima comunione mi sento vecchia, ma non per il vecio..." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 6, 1956. Letter no. 89.

³⁵ "Mia cara Signora, godo nel sentirti dire del tuo peso, e della tua freschezza, come non posso far a meno di essere lusingato per i complimenti che ricevi, e spero che qualcosa resti anche per il povero emigrante; Bisogna anche che ti domandi un favore, "se puoi farmelo," quando ne hai un'altro avvertimi che così

Sara did not back down submissively in her response. Instead, she spun the discussion from initial enthusiasm to dry pragmatism, and ended the letter by reciprocating the furies of jealousy, by turning the table around and threatening to exact revenge should she find out of *his* infidelity. She wrote:

I have no time, nor thoughts for any compliments that I receive here or there as an indication that I'm well. For no other reason did I write this to you, and *if I find out that you took advantage of my being away, and you got to know other women, God help you when I come down, hopefully soon!* Upon Sara's word, that you know very well, when she pulls out her claws, then we'll see. And about muscles, we'll see who dies first, and then we'll see about talking...³⁶

Following Sara's response, Dante backed down and tried to make amends by murmuring some kind of apology:

Cara brontolona (Dear complainer), I see that you are quite wicked. You don't accept any more a word, not even when said jokingly. Don't worry, as far as I'm concerned you won't need to use your claws on me. Of this you can be sure, even though the temptations are many, yours truly doesn't lose his head over this. I close this letter with my best wishes, as I hold you close to my heart. See you soon, I say.³⁷

To lighten up the argument and quell the tensions between her and Dante, Sara responded: "don't take it personally, I don't think your wife is so cruel, you should know

comincio anch'io a fare qualche passo..... scusami; anch'io o un po' aumentato di peso, non grasso, ma ben i muscoli sono come l'acciaio, dunque pensa tu se al posto della lettera da te scritta, fossi tu in persona, cosa succederebbe?... Voglio vedere se sei capace di dirmelo." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 15, 1956. Letter no. 168.

³⁶ "*non ho tempo neanche pensieri se ricevo qualche complimento segno che sto bene, non per altro ti scrissi, e che se vengo a sapere che hai approfittato della mia lontananza per conoscere altre donne quando vengo e spero presto guai a te, parola di Sara, che tu ben conosci quando tira fuori i suoi artigli, poi vedremo) e per via dei muscoli vedremo chi muore prima e dopo vedremo di parlare tanto... "* Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 25, 1956. Letter no. 96.

³⁷ "*Cara brontolona vedo proprio che sei cattiva, non accetti più una parola neanche per scherzo, non aver paura che per conto mio non gli tirerai mai fuori i tuoi artigli di questo puoi star ben sicura, sebbene le tentazioni siano tante il sottoscritto non perde la testa per quello. Termino con il salutarti tanto e stringendoti al mio cuore, ti dico a presto."* Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 31, 1956. Letter no. 171.

her, or did you forget her already? I think not. I close this letter sending you my best wishes, lots of *baci e abbracci* (kisses and hugs), Sara.”³⁸ Finally, the argument was closed and never referred to again in the letters with Dante’s more emphatic apology to Sara in his next letter: “forgive me for these two words out of place, but every once in a while, they come back to me (like now as I’m writing to you), but I think that between you and me, we can say anything to each other. But if you’re angry, I won’t say them anymore, forgive me again. I love you and I never forget you, and You?...”³⁹

Another uncertainty related to migration that emerges from the letters is the fear of unknown circumstances that could potentially destroy the dream of family reunification. For example, one common source of anxiety was caused by the need to fulfill the visa requirements imposed by the Canadian government.⁴⁰

The following letter from Sara to Dante, describes some of these difficulties:

Mio caro Dante, I’ve just returned from Rome and I’m writing to let you know that everything worked out for the best, concerning the trip and the meeting. We wrote to you even from Rome, but I want to tell you now calmly how it went. We left Vicenza in the morning of the 25th, and slept in Rome for one night. Once the examination and interview were done, we visited Saint Peter’s. At 8:30pm we were already home. It was better this way. The children slept on the train. At the meeting, there was the same doctor who examined us at Castelfranco. Since he was looking at me, I talked to him and he recognized me, there was even the consul general who had been at Castelfranco, but I couldn’t talk to him, because I was required to

³⁸ “*non prendertela, tua moglie credo proprio non sia così cattiva, dovrete conoscerla o ti sei già dimenticato, credo di no, Termino salutandoti tanto, ricevi tanti baci e abbracci, Sara.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 7, 1956. Letter no. 112.

³⁹ “*scusami queste due parole fuori posto, ma’ ogni tanto mi vengono presenti; (come ora che ti scrivo) ma penso che frà me e te si può dirsele, però se ti arrabbi non le dico più, scusa ancora Ti voglio bene e non Ti dimentico mai, e Tu?...*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 12, 1956. Letter no. 172.

⁴⁰ See Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).

speak to someone else. There are three of them who sign the visa. This one was more picky than the others. He wanted to know every single detail (*morte e miracoli*). I answered all of his questions. Nonetheless, I was scared out of my wits. Altogether, even this one went well. I can't tell you what a sigh of relief I breathed, *caro*, it wasn't as easy as at Castelfranco. There were a lot of people, and think that from eight-thirty in the morning to noon, if Luca had not been with me to give me a hand, I don't know how I would have handled it, with the children who don't listen to reason.⁴¹

There is no question that the examination process for issuing visas to prospective immigrants was extremely distressing for both women and men.⁴² The outcome of these official meetings would determine their fate, and decide whether they would stay in impoverished Italy, or have a chance to improve their economic well-being by moving to Canada. Inevitably the fears of prospective migrants were compounded by the awareness that within minutes of the interrogation their migration project and all hopes for family reunification could be shattered at a bureaucrat's whim.

Furthermore, if we examine Sara's experience at the embassy in gendered terms, we observe that for a married working-class woman mired in an agrotown setting for much of her life, dealing with bureaucracies presented some difficulties. Her limited experience in the public sphere, combined with the pressures of travelling across the peninsula with her two toddlers (even though she was accompanied by her brother-in-law) must have been a

⁴¹ "Mio caro Dante, appena arrivata da Roma ti scrivo subito fandoti sapere che tutto è andato per il meglio, viaggio e visita, ti abbiamo scritto anche da Roma ma voglio dirti meglio con più calma, siamo partiti da Vicenza il 25 mattina abbiamo dormito a Roma una notte solo passata la visita siamo andati a visitare san Pietro alle 20,30 siamo tornati a casa e stato meglio così i bambini hanno sempre dormito per treno, alla visita c'era il medico che ci ha visitato a Castelfranco visto che mi guardava tanto gli ho spiegato allora ma riconosciuto, c'era pure il console che era a Castelfranco ma non ho potuto parlare perché sono stata destinata da un altro siccome ce ne sono tre che firmano il visto questo era più pignolo ha voluto sapere (*morte e miracoli*) di tutto, io indifferentemente gli rispondevo, avevo una fifa ma insomma è andata bene anche questa. Ti dico che ho messo un sospiro di sollievo caro, non è stato tanto facile come a Castelfranco, c'era pure tanta gente pensa dalle otto fino a mezzo giorno se non avevo Luca non so proprio come me la sbrigavo(?), con i bambini e non intendono ragioni." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 27, 1956. Letter no. 84.

⁴² For an anthropological analysis on prospective immigrants' distresses in passing the official interview as part of U.S. visa procedures for migration to the U.S., see Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* (2003).

daunting experience. Not unlike other working-class women who came of age in the late 1940s in a small village, Sara's life revolved around the domestic sphere. As a woman whose husband had migrated to Canada, she tended to her children's material, spiritual and emotional needs, performed household chores and duties within the multiple-family household she and her children lived in, nurtured and sustained kinship ties around her, kept a close correspondence with her husband in Powell River, and prepared for the imminent departure for Canada. None of these activities required her to frequent or perform in the public sphere, especially in a larger context outside of the *paese* (town) in which she lived. Certainly one can speculate on how encounters such as that at the embassy might have been different for married men. As Lorber suggests, as a married man "with recognized interests to protect, he can speak up and expect to be heard in public gatherings. And, as an individual *whose basic needs are provided*, he can devote his time to building the exchange networks that enhance social influence and prestige."⁴³ Indeed, as Elson and Pearson argue, if we juxtapose the identity of a married man (as breadwinner, and frequenter of the public sphere) with power, we can discern how the man's role as breadwinner was not limited to economic power, but was "also constituted in the process of establishing the connection of the family with the wider society."⁴⁴ Consequently, as the public representative of the family, the male breadwinner was conferred social power,⁴⁵ (defined by Elson and Pearson as "collective power, reproducible through social processes, relatively autonomous from the characteristics of

⁴³ Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* 137.

⁴⁴ Elson and Pearson 156-157.

⁴⁵ Elson and Pearson 154.

particular individuals”)⁴⁶ which in turn, facilitated his moving about in the public sphere.⁴⁷

Of course, even when the interview went well and the visa was granted, prospective migrants still confronted unknowns about the nature of daily life abroad. We glimpse this through a seemingly innocuous exchange between Dante and Sara regarding women’s fashion in Powell River. In the years following the end of World War Two, Italian fashion for women was highly influenced by American women’s dress and way of life that were seen as “modern” and emancipated. As Penelope Morris, Anna Maria Torriglia, Paul Ginsborg and Silvia Cassamagnaghi⁴⁸ suggest, *il modo Americano* (the American way of life) had penetrated virtually all facets of Italian life. For an Italian woman who was preparing to migrate to Canada, it seemed important to prepare a wardrobe in *la moda Americana* (American fashion), in order to integrate herself more quickly into the new community. In the following epistolary exchange, however, we also witness how a simple inquiry about fashion in Canada brought a number of sexist assumptions to light. In answer to Sara’s question about women’s dress in Powell River, Dante wrote:

And now don’t laugh, or think badly of what I’m about to tell you, always concerning dress and fashion. Here the weaker sex, older women, married women and single women, take care of keeping fit and exposed the two most extreme points of the female anatomy; (You

⁴⁶ Elson and Pearson 151. As Elson and Pearson argue, in contrast to social power, “private power is purely individual power, contingent as the specific characteristics of particular individuals, reproducible only by chance.” Elson and Pearson 151.

⁴⁷ Obviously, other dynamics also came into play. These include rural people travelling to the big city and semi-literate individuals dealing with bureaucracy.

⁴⁸ On American influences to Italian way of life in immediate postwar, refer to Penelope Morris, ed. *Women in Italy, 1945-1960: An Interdisciplinary Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990); Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2002); and Silvia Cassamagnaghi, *Immagini dall’America: Mass media e modelli femminili nell’Italia del secondo dopoguerra, 1945-1960* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007).

tell me what they are...). They also care a great deal about wearing sleeveless tops, like shirts, blouses, light-colored and quite transparent. I'm telling you this to give you an idea. I'm not suggesting you dress like this. Actually, as far as I'm concerned, you know that I don't care for these things at all, don't think badly about me, but as you know, *l'occhio vuole la sua parte* (looks also count). This is what I can tell you based on my experience.⁴⁹

The irony here is that while Dante was explicit in his statement that he was indifferent to women's dress fashions, he also admitted that looks count, and discouraged Sara from wearing those same fashions. To excuse himself from this double-standard, Dante resorted to the proverbial expression, "*l'occhio vuole la sua parte*" (looks also count). Indeed, as Stanley Brandes suggests, "the utilization of proverbs is an effective appeal to time-honored sources of authority; hence, whenever talking about sexual matters, men will resort to them as a conscious means to buttress and legitimize their own point of view."⁵⁰ However, the exchange on women's dress attire between Dante and Sara did not end there. A little further in the letter, Dante offered his dress recommendations for his wife and children during their transatlantic voyage:

trousers are ideal for everyone, including you, they are less cumbersome than slips and things, especially for going up and down the stairs on the ship. They are also safer from showing your private parts... to the curiosity and maliciousness of the others. You're thinking that I'm jealous, right? Yes, that's true, and why shouldn't I

⁴⁹ "Ed'ora non ridere, o pensar male per quanto ti dico, sempre in merito al costume e moda, qui il sesso debole, siano vecchie, siano spose e signorine, ci tengono assai, vorrei dire più di tutto, a tener ben curate, e ben sollevati, i due punti più sporgenti; (Dimmi tu quali sonno...) Pure ci tengono tanto alla moda senza maniche, e alle camicette, o blusette... chiare e ben trasparenti, questo per darti un po' di idea, non per dirti che dovrai vestire così, anzi per conto mio, sai che non ci tengo per niente, non pensar male, ma come sai, (*l'occhio vuole la sua parte*,) questo è quanto ti posso dire di queste cose, per la mia esperienza." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁵⁰ Stanley Brandes, "Like Wounded Stags: Male Sexual Ideology in an Andalusian Town," *Sexual Meanings: the Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, eds. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 218.

bel?... If I'm not jealous of what's mine, what should I be jealous of?⁵¹

Of course one may wonder how Dante knew that women's private parts were visible when they climbed the stairs onboard ship, unless his male gaze was also wandering onboard the ship, S.S. Saturnia heading for Canada. But the other obvious question that emerges is: why did he feel the need to tell his wife that she was his private property? I'm suggesting here that the rupture of migration between Dante and Sara had heightened his sexual insecurities about her fidelity. Thus, it appears that because she was separated from him, Dante felt the need to reinforce his hold on her, otherwise, he felt there was a danger that she might escape him.

Now, how did Sara respond to her husband's claim on her? She replied: "I too thought about sewing myself some trousers, but *caro mio*, Paolo doesn't like seeing me wear them. He says that I'm not a man, and that I look ridiculous."⁵² She continued: "naturally, I'm not listening to him, but you see, he's starting early to give orders, even to his *mamma*, he says 'I'm the boss after my *padre*.' Therefore, don't be jealous, because your son would set me straight, even though he's barely a meter high."⁵³

Two corollaries emerge from Sara's reply. The first is that she agreed that trousers were a good thing for her to wear. At first glance, we might be persuaded to observe

⁵¹ "i calzonni vanno bene anche per te, meno ingombranti delle sottane, per andar sù e giù per le scale della nave, e più sicuri per non far vedere le tue cose... alla curiosità e malignità del mondo. Tu pensi che sono geloso, sì è vero, e perché non dovrei esserlo!?... Se non sono geloso delle cose mie di che cosa dovrei esserlo!?" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁵² "ho pensato pure io di farmi i pantaloni ma caro mio Paolo non vuole vedermi dice che non sono un uomo e che sono ridicola." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 14, 1956. Letter no. 74.

⁵³ "non sto ascoltando lui naturalmente ma vedi incomincia presto a dar ordini anche alla sua mamma, dice 'sono padrone io dopo mio padre' dunque non far il geloso perché tuo figlio mi farebbe la morale sebbene sia alto un zoccolo." "ho pensato pure io di farmi i pantaloni ma caro mio Paolo non vuole vedermi dice che non sono un uomo e che sono ridicola." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 14, 1956. Letter no. 74

agency in her decision to sew herself and wear a pair of trousers (especially, since women's trousers in postwar Italy symbolized a break from women's traditional attire). However, the potential influence of the prescriptive advice from her husband cannot be ignored and it is therefore difficult to know whether she made her choice voluntarily or in order to comply with Dante's request. Second, in her response to his comment, "If I'm not jealous of what's mine," it seems to me that Sara was giving in to her husband's jealousy, by responding that he need not worry and by attempting to quell his fears by pointing out that, another male in the family, their young son, would be the first to "*fare la morale*" ("to set her straight").

Over the next two weeks, Sara busily prepared her wardrobe. As she and her husband continued their discussions on what to bring, and what not to bring, and how much money these items cost Dante reminded Sara to invest in some sturdy luggage and wooden trunks. He also asked her to bring woolen pillows for the train ride, and: "in terms of traveling clothes, long pants for all three of you, for when you arrive, make sure you have a dress to wear upon getting off the train...".⁵⁴ There are several possible reasons why Dante recommended to his wife that she wear a dress upon arriving in Powell River. Foremost, this instruction signals Dante's desire for his wife to embody a certain aesthetic ideal of femininity that was characteristic of the "natural woman" image of femininity in postwar Italy. As Lorber argues, "dress makes personal and social statements. As long as gender categories are socially significant, dress will reflect

⁵⁴"*come tenuta di viaggio, calzoni lunghi per tutti tré, per quando arrivi, vedi di aver un vestito da metterti prima di scendere dal treno...*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 19, 1956. Letter no. 169.

difference and signal gender identification.”⁵⁵ Even though in large urban centers, like Rome, Italian women were wearing trousers, as the letters of Giordano Rossi to Ester di Leonardi reveal, the culturally acceptable dress of a traditional Italian woman stood in sharp contrast to the image of a “modern” *all’Americana* woman whose trousers signified that she was liberated, emancipated, and possibly promiscuous.

One of the curious features of some of this correspondence between couples is how infrequently the migrants described the work they did. For example, in a majority of the letters written by Dante del Moro, his only reference to his work appears in concluding throwaway lines like: “*il lavoro va bene*” (“work is going well”). This finding is surprising, especially given the significance that life in the productive sphere represented for a male migrant whose purpose for migration was based heavily on working and earning good wages. Yet, working in the mills of Powell River—as Gabriele Scardellato has shown in his study on Italian workers in Powell River⁵⁶—was extremely demanding work. And, as a migrant husband whose loved ones were never far from his *pensieri*, being away from them was mentally distressful as well. Indeed, as Harney observes, “The abnormality of life for the migrants came not from promiscuity but from total physical and cultural frustration.”⁵⁷ As Dante’s words illustrate, physical exhaustion was part of the migrant’s work experience, as he wrote to Sara: “Even my work is going well, it’s a little hard, but I’m happy all the same, and I work willingly. And my boss is happy, he

⁵⁵ Judith Lorber, “Dismantling Noah’s Ark,” *The Social Construction of Gender*, eds. Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991) 361.

⁵⁶ Gabriele P. Scardellato, “Italian Immigrant Workers in Powell River, B.C.: A Case Study of Settlement Before World War II,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985): 145-163.

⁵⁷ Harney, “Men without Women” 217.

treats me well, for everything and in everything.”⁵⁸ Several months later, in advising Sara that he had little time to spare, he wrote: “my work is going well. For this second fortnight period in August, I worked twelve days straight, without even one day’s break, other than going to mass in the evening... .”⁵⁹

While the work-related descriptions provided in Dante’s letters offer few details, it’s clear that work was extremely important to him, not least because his earnings provided for his family in Italy and would enable them to join him. Yet, as Harney observes, “the phantom that lived with them was, at least in part, created by fear and guilt about how well they were fulfilling family obligations.”⁶⁰ In Dante’s case indeed, fulfilling his family obligations by providing constant emotional, material, and psychological support was the core of his *pensiero*. This was likely the reason why his letters were filled with references to the well-being, concerns and worries of his wife, children and other loved ones in Arcugnano, but said little about his own struggles or frustrations. Perhaps the following words best summarize his intentions: “Today as I write to you is Sunday, and I worked like every other day, I’m a little tired but I’m fine, and I’m happy because I see that with every day’s work, I earn money and put it aside for you.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ “*Pure il mio lavoro prosegue bene, è un pò duro ma sono contento lo stesso, perché sto bene, e lavoro volentieri, pure il mio padrone lo è e mi tratta bene in tutto, e per tutto.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, April 12, 1956. Letter no. 160.

⁵⁹ “*il mio lavoro continua bene, questa seconda quindicina d’agosto ho fatto fin dodici giorni continui, senza conoscere festa, nome che andar alla messa della sera... .*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 31, 1956. Letter no. 171.

⁶⁰ Harney, “Men without Women” 214.

⁶¹ “*Oggi che ti scrivo è domenica, ed’ho lavorato come tutti i giorni, un pò stanco mà sto bene, e sono contento perche’ vedo che ogni giorno guadagno e metto da parte per voi.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 25, 1956. Letter no. 175.

In this letter-series, we witness Dante's intense desire and sense of responsibility to fulfill his role as the male breadwinner, provider and protector of his family. Husbands, fathers and brothers who set out for Canada in the postwar years, before their families joined them, sent their large savings via bank transfers. This form of transferring money between Canada and Italy was considered the most trusted means of sending remittances, while smaller cash amounts were usually included with the letters. In cases of emergency, however, sums like fifty dollar bills were exceptionally sent in the mail. This method carried a risk that made migrants nervous about sending large bills in the mail, as we read in a letter from Dante to Sara: "You see, now I find myself forced to send you the money, with the risk of losing it, ...if I send it to you through the bank, as I usually do, the money won't arrive on time. I hope they won't be opening especially this letter. I'd be very sorry if they did, *è frutto del mio sudore* (it's the fruit of my sweat)."⁶² While the smaller amounts sent home were perceived by remittance-senders as "extra" money, in reality, much of the money received (regardless of the amount), including gift-money, was spent on meeting the daily subsistence needs of a transnational household. This included expenses incurred on groceries, medication, and treats for the children.

Moreover, a migrant's wages earned in Canada heightened his male pride as a good breadwinner and overall provider for his family. This source of self-realization and pride is crystallized through Dante's words to Sara, as he wrote: "I'll immediately send you everything you need, don't worry about it, with the salary that I earn, I can support three

⁶² "*dunque non farti mancare niente e provvedi di portare tutto ciò che ti ho ordinato. Vedi, ora mi trovo costretto a rischio e pericolo di perderli, mandarti \$50 per questa lettera, dico sono costretto perché se ti mando regolarmente per banca non ti arrivano in tempo, spero che non sia proprio questa che va aperta, mi dispiacerebbe assai, è frutto del mio sudore.*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 22, 1956. Letter no. 174.

families like mine in Italy and not in destitution, but as *Signori* (in luxury).” Then he added:

I paid back my debt to Elio in just two months. Plus, I deposited in the bank \$400 for your application, plus a few small expenses for myself, like a smoke, and other odd items of necessity. I’ll also tell you something else. If all goes well, I’ve found a more comfortable home for us by the water, and it’s near my boss’s house. It’s in a nice quiet location, where there is lots of fresh clean air and sun as it is now. You just need to walk a couple of steps, and you’re right on the beach. What do you think of that?⁶³

In this excerpt, we observe several important threads that signal a male provider’s pride in effectively and efficiently fulfilling his obligations to *his* family overseas. First, by advising Sara that he was sending her everything she needed, he reassured her that she had no reason to worry about the family’s subsistence. His earnings enabled him to meet his family’s material needs to the point that he believed that his earnings were not just enough for his family’s subsistence, but for three other families in Italy as well. Further, his earnings in Canada led him to believe his family’s economic and class status would change to higher levels of society. This is an important point, especially in light of postwar Italian society’s nearly-impermeable class structure. By mentioning that he had repaid his debt to his sponsoring cousin Elio, Dante meant to say that his earnings were significant enough to enable him to also be debt-free. As such, he could now concentrate on setting aside money for the single most important goal of his migration project, that is his family’s arrival in Powell River. As his wife’s sponsor, he had deposited the required four hundred dollars for her migration application to be processed. And, in addition to all

⁶³ “*ti mando subito il necessario, non pensare che con quello che guadagno posso mantenere in Italia tre famiglie come la mia, e da signori, ... Il mio debito con Elio l’ho pagato in due mesi, Più ho fatt deposito in banca, per la tua richiesta, di 400\$, più quel poco che spendo per me, per fumare, e qualche oggetto che occorre sempre. Ti fò presente una cosa, se tutto va bene ho trovato un’abitazione più comoda in Riva al mare, e vicino alla casa del mio padrone, è un bel posto, fuori del chiasso, e salutare all’aria e sole, specie come adesso, quattro passi e sei sulla spiaggia, cosa ne dici?*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 15, 1956. Letter no. 168.

of this, he had found a nice little house for his family near the ocean and near his boss's house, hoping it would please them.

While there is no question that the transnational family benefited materially from the male migrant's fulfillment of his roles, at the same time, his economic gains and power entitled him to make specific requests of his wife. For instance, in preparation for her arrival in Powell River, Dante wrote: "make sure you bring *tutto* (everything) that I told you to."⁶⁴ "*Tutto*" in this case included, men's *canottiere* (undershirts), a thermometer, a watch, *essenze di liquore* (liquor essences), wine-making instruments, jewellery, including a wedding band for himself (which he notes that she had lost),⁶⁵ and other special requests also voiced by his cousins and friends in Powell River. This additional responsibility could not have been welcomed with delight by Sara who was already coping with her duties as a mother of two toddlers, running a household within the walls of a multiple-family household, and preparing for the family's permanent departure and settlement overseas. As a result, her workload had increased significantly.

On September 22, 1956, Dante wrote to Sara: "I see here from your writing how much you worry, and while I expected this to happen, you shouldn't lose sleep over so little. I always told you not to worry, that you have a man who is still capable of thinking for his family and meeting their needs. So concerning the question of... ." ⁶⁶ He then proceeded to give her advice on who in their kin network in Arcugnano could provide her

⁶⁴ "*provvedi di portare tutto ciò che ti ho ordinato.*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 22, 1956. Letter no. 174.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁶⁶ "*Vedo qui dal tuo scritto quante preoccupazioni ai e in parte me le aspettavo, ma Tu non dovresti perdere sonni per così poco, Ti o pur sempre detto di non aver pensieri, che ai ancora un uomo capace di pensare per la sua famiglia e a tutti i suoi bisogni, dunque per questo...*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 22, 1956. Letter no. 174.

with additional funds in order for her to buy the items he had requested as well as other necessities required prior to the departure for Canada. In this excerpt, a husband's role as protector was reinforced by his experience as an immigrant. We witness him protecting his wife from "needless" worries by shouldering them himself and emphasizing that his capabilities extended beyond his physical strength into the realm of moral and psychological support. Along the wire of communication between husband and wife, the role of male protector was sustained by the confident advice he gave his wife regarding a plethora of issues that had been left unresolved at the time of departure in March of 1956. Such matters included advice on handling large sums of money and who to talk to for some financial help, or how to secure the children's Catholic education, handle family tensions and townsfolk gossip and select an appropriate godfather for their son. For the most part, Sara accepted his advice, except on one occasion when she replied: "don't tell me that I'm stubborn. I too know what I need to do, and how to behave..."⁶⁷

As a good provider, breadwinner and protector of the transnational family, the male migrant worked to fulfill an ideal of the self-made man enabled through migration. As we observed earlier, the wages earned in men's productive labour in Canada translated into economic gains that materialized both in Italy and Canada. The economic power gained by a male migrant, through his Canadian earnings and savings, not only reinforced, both privately and publicly, the notion that opportunities for economic improvement were real in postwar Canada, but that the myth of America, personified through individual economic success, was within their grasp. We witness this phenomenon through Dante's godfather in Italy who wrote to Dante encouraging him to return one day to Italy, "in a

⁶⁷ "*non dirmi che faccio di testa mia, so anchio come debba comportarmi ...* ." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 7, 1956. Letter no. 112.

beautiful, large car and with lots of money for you to buy at least all the land you and your brothers worked on. But then, you'll have others working it, and you'll just be visiting the *affittuari* (land tenants)...”⁶⁸ This image of a migrant returning to Italy as landowner was one of the most sought-after dreams for male migrants whose families had been tenants. As Ramirez argues, “American savings allowed the *ritornati* (returnee migrants) to refuse to submit again to wage labour or tenant farming under the old landlords.”⁶⁹ *Ritornati* who returned to Italy to buy land with the intention of renting it out were actively engaged in the change of status that resulted for themselves and their families. They were no longer farm labourers, but rather had become independent farmers and landowners, albeit on a small scale and without the benefit of structural reforms that should have been implemented by the state. Indeed, through this *compare*'s eyes, America signified “the fulfillment of their hopes,”⁷⁰ as historian Dirk Hoerder suggests. It also represented the dream and opportunity for a man to “make something of himself,” that is, to realizing the independent-entrepreneur dream that was encompassed in the myth of America.

We also witness evidence of this dream in a letter from Luciano Colonello to his son, Gianlorenzo. The excerpt is drawn from a discussion in which Luciano advised his son to hold on to the money that he had earned in Michel, B.C. and to not spend it on cars and other material things. He wrote: “Because, as you remember well, when you left you

⁶⁸ “con una bella macchina lunga e spaziosa, e con un sacco di quattrini di comprarti almeno tutta la terra che lavoravi un giorno tu e i tuoi fratelli; però dopo farla lavorare dagli altri; e tu andare solo a visitare i tuoi affittuari...” Letter from Giovanni Manfredi to Dante del Moro, n.d. estimated December 1956. Letter 118.

⁶⁹ Ramirez, *On the Move* 64.

⁷⁰ Hoerder and Rössler 8.

said that you were leaving to *per farti qualche cosa per te* (make something of yourself)...⁷¹ As we infer from Luciano's words, the male aspiration to "make something of himself" was sustained not only by a show of pride at the material gains referred to in letters, but also, through the enormous familial obligations he sought to fulfill. For Gianlorenzo, some of these familial pressures were conveyed by his mother's admonishment to: "make sure you take good care of yourself, don't get sick because we need your help. And if you get sick, it's bad for you, but worse for us."⁷² Indeed, based on the content of the letters, it seems that both Dante and Gianlorenzo did make something of themselves. As observed earlier, Dante's success had enabled him to purchase a home, and sponsor his wife and children. Within a few years of working in Michel and later, in Montreal, Gianlorenzo had purchased a car, and a two-storey house in Spilimbergo for his parents and sisters to live in rent-free for the rest of their lives.

The meaning of a male migrant's success and how it was perceived in the eyes of the sending community's townsfolk is also worthy of attention. In her analysis of the role of the good provider, sociologist Jessie Bernard observes, "men were judged as men by the level of living they provided."⁷³ In a migration context, the level of a migrant's economic success was mirrored not only through the money he sent to his immediate family, but also in the kind of life they appeared to be living, in part as a result of his remittances. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the letters that Sara wrote to Dante

⁷¹ "*Perché ti ricordi bene che quando sei partito ai detto che vai via per farti qualche cosa per te...*" Letter from Luciano Colonello and Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 18, 1954. Letter no. 20.

⁷² "*guarda da tenerti daconto di non amalarti perche noi abbiamo bisogno del tuo aiuto e se tu si mali, male per te e peggio per noi...*" Letter from Marianna Domenica and Luciano Colonello to Gianlorenzo Colonello, July 28, 1954. Letter no. 21.

⁷³ Jessie Bernard, "The Good-Provider Role: Its Rise and Fall," *American Psychologist* 36.1 (January 1981): 4.

about the way in which she and her children had become subjects of observation for the townsfolk. After receiving five dollars in the mail from Dante as a birthday gift, Sara wrote to Dante and advised him that she would be buying herself a new dress with the money: “because, as you know, I am being watched more carefully than before. This means that if I dress well, you are earning good money, if not, it means you are struggling ... You know how our world is, appearances mean everything.”⁷⁴ Not only did Dante need to make enough earnings to send to his wife and children for their subsistence, but he also had to send “extra” funds to ensure that the message to the townsfolk was clear in demonstrating his success and justifying the sacrifice of his absence.

Dante’s absence from the household also gave the townsfolk of Arcugnano an opportunity to carefully scrutinize the kind of life Sara was leading as a result of his absence. Indeed, as Elson and Pearson argue, “the absence of a husband is as significant as his presence for the establishment of a woman’s social identity.... ‘subject to an overall culture of male dominance.’”⁷⁵ The town of Arcugnano was no exception in following through on a degree of social control rooted in patriarchal norms and ideals. In this letter, we observe Sara’s frustrations concerning the townsfolk’s whispering voices that circulated as a result of Dante’s absence. She wrote: “*Caro Dante*, you ask me how I’m doing. They are starting to talk about me. They are starting to say that now that the husband is away, I’m putting on weight, that I’m turning white and red. They say that

⁷⁴ “*perché come sai sono guardata più di prima adesso, verrebbe a dire che se sono elegante tu guadagni, senò sei messo male ... sai come il nostro mondo, vuol vedere le apparenze.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, n.d. estimated summer 1956. Letter no. 98.

⁷⁵ Elson and Pearson 152.

when you were here, you overworked me. You know how people are, they're always suspicious of others."⁷⁶

Not only were townsfolk suspicious, they also exercised control through social discipline and coercion. Implicit in Sara's letters is a sense that the townsfolk were on the lookout for any kind of transgressive behaviour (social, moral and sexual) on her part. The lines of communication between the townsfolk in the *paese* and the migrant's network of kin and co-villagers in Canada worked with such efficiency and velocity, that there is no doubt that any negative gossip from the town would have made its way quickly to the migrant's new address.⁷⁷ In addition to confiding in Dante her concerns about the circulating voices, another reason for Sara to reveal this information to Dante was, we can reasonably surmise, to mount some kind of defensive response should word get to him from any co-villager. Sara's strategy worked because in his next letter Dante wrote:

I'm happy for you, for your good health. Don't listen to that talk. I know in what state I left you, and I also know that even if you were overworked, I don't think I'm to blame. But in any case, let them say what they want. Let them enjoy it if they can, and what's more, let them eat their own wickedness and hatred, because I know that it all starts from there.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ "Caro Dante mi domandi della mia salute, cominciano a mormorare che manca il marito perche sono grassa, bianca e rossa, dicono quando eri allora mi sfruttavi troppo, sai come sono gli uomini, pensano sempre al male." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, n.d. estimated, June-July 1956. Letter no. 77.

⁷⁷ In his essay, "Men without Women" (1978) Robert Harney makes reference to the inter-relationship between hometown gossip and the male migrant's state of mind in the course of his migration experience and separation from his immediate family while working in Canada.

⁷⁸ "sono contento per te, per la tua salute, non badare alle chiacchiere, io so come ti ho lasciato e a che punto eri, e so pure che se eri così, non credo fosse stato per causa mia, com'unque lascia che dicano, lascia che godano, se lo possono fare, e più lascia che si mangino la sua cattiveria, e il suo odio, perché lo sò bene che tutto parte da qui." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 10, 1957. Letter no. 151.

In addition to working for wages and increasing his savings, as well as worrying over his loved ones, and keeping the townsfolk's suspecting voices at bay, there was also an enormous emotional price for a male breadwinner and provider to pay as migrant. Living and working thousands of kilometres away from his family entailed personal difficulties that ranged from more to less intense. Already in the gender division of labour, as Bernard observes, the increased onus of work and wages for men as providers (and workers in the public sphere) had reduced "the amount of time available for spontaneous emotional give-and-take between husbands and wives."⁷⁹ For migrant men whose work entailed a physical and temporal separation from their wives and children, this emotional distance was further exacerbated. As a result, not only were gender roles reified and reinforced through migration, there was also an acute awareness on behalf of the migrant breadwinners that they would have to endure an emotional loss in order for the project to succeed. We witness this awareness in Dante's letters to Sara in which his loneliness and desire to be reunited with her and their children were articulated. In the exchange, there is one scenario in particular that encapsulates the emotional cost he experienced as a result of his separation from his family. It concerns their son's much-anticipated Confirmation ceremony, and the emotional difficulty Dante experienced by being absent:

I see here from your writing what you are telling me about Paolo. And to tell you the truth, I don't know how to tell you how happy I am. I would only want to be there with you the day in which our young man receives the Divine Grace... I can't help telling you that despite my immense joy, I am jealous and I envy you, and your good fortune to help our little one on that holy day. On the other hand, I think that as his *madre*, you have the right to help them in their sorrows and joys of

⁷⁹ Bernard 3.

life. It means that as always, I'll be there with my heart and my love that is stronger than ever.⁸⁰

To compensate for his absence, Dante emphasized the importance of a mother's presence in her child's life. Sara responded with the words: "don't envy me for the good fortune I have in assisting him on that holy day. It would be best if we were both present...".⁸¹

B) Reproduction and Domesticity

In the months leading up to their family's reunion in the mill town of Powell River in 1956, one theme that frequently emerged from Dante's letters concerned his ardent wish that his wife would be happy in Powell River. This was captured above all in the quotation that I have used as an epigraph for this chapter, in which Dante described how easy Sara's life would be, because she would only have to do groceries, cook and take the children to school while he was off toiling for wages.⁸² Considering that it was

⁸⁰ *"Vedo qui dal tuo scritto ciò che mi dici per Paolo e per dirti il vero non sò come esprimere la mia gioia, solo vorrei essere in compagnia quel giorno che il nostro ometto riceve la grazia divina... Non posso far a meno di dirti che nonostante la mia grande contentezza, sono geloso e ti invidio, invidio la tua fortuna di poter assistere il nostro piccolo in quel santo giorno, ma da una parte penso che tu sei la mamma ed' hai diritto di assisterli come nel dolore, anche nella gioia. Vuol dire che io come sempre sarò presente con il mio cuore e con il mio affetto sempre grande."* Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 28, 1956. Letter no. 165.

⁸¹ *"non invidiarmi per la fortuna che ho di assisterlo in quel santo giorno, sarebbe meglio che fossimo tutti e due presenti..."* Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 6, 1956. Letter no. 89.

⁸² *"I hope you will be happy here and thankful,... Think that all you need to do are the groceries, bring the little ones to the nursery school, and everything else. You'll see that this is more useful than reading the magazines Grand Hotel and Intimità... Think only that while I'll be at work, you will have nothing else to do but prepare the meals, the best you can, and patiently wait for the return of your loved ones to gather at the daily table."* ("spero ti troverai contenta mi ringrazierai, se solo pensi che devi arrangiarti di fare la spesa, di portare i piccoli o all'asilo o alla scuola, e poi tutto il resto, vedrai che questo è più utile che non il Grand Hotel ed Intimità... pensa solo che io sono al lavoro, e tu non hai da far altro che far da mangiare, il meglio possibile, ed attendere con pazienza il ritorno dei tuoi cari per il desco quotidiano." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

completely normal, indeed desirable for a working-class Italian, Catholic wife to devote all of her time and energies to meeting the needs of her husband and children, it is not surprising that Sara did not object to the promise of a quiet, domestic life. Yet, what clearly did irritate her was Dante's teasing reference to the leisure time she managed to find.

"I've taken my place in doing other household chores," she wrote, "so that, *caro* Dante, I have little time to read, even the *Grand Hotel*,⁸³ an enormous sacrifice, you know (I'm joking)."⁸⁴ In her reply, she reminded Dante that because her sister-in-law was bedridden, she had additional household chores and little time to read magazines. In this exchange, we observe a denial on both Dante's and Sara's part of her personal entitlement to reading material she would have normally enjoyed. Instead, Sara's response was precisely to justify herself entirely as a woman tied to her primary roles as nurturer and domestic of the household. The question of self-entitlement, she appeared to say, was not even an option.

Yet, what was Sara's life really like in Powell River? Did it conform to the ideal that Dante had constructed in his letter of July 24, 1956? In the following excerpt from a

⁸³ These weekly *fotoromanzi* (photo-novels of a romantic nature), as they were called, including *Grand Hotel*, *Intimità* and *Bolero Film* were a form of *feuilleton* invented in 1946 that became best-sellers overnight, capturing a non-elite female readership internationally. Single and married women working in the factories, *casalinghe* (housewives) toiling in industrial North and rural South across Italy, Europe and overseas (including Canada) avidly read the weekly episodes of these romantic *fotoromanzi*. At a mere 12 to 25 lire a copy, these impossible love stories ending happily ever after represented an opportunity for working-class women to dream of romantic love and class mobility during one of their breaks from their daily duties. Antecedents to the Argentine "telenovelas" that would follow later on television, *fotoromanzi* like *Grand Hotel*, *Intimità* and *Bolero Film* are considered the most typical byproducts of mass culture in the postwar period. <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fotoromanzo>; www.lucidamente.com.

⁸⁴ "*ho preso il mio posto per far quei pochi lavori di casa così caro Dante, non ho tanto tempo neanche di leggere più il grand hotel, un sacrificio grande sai (scherzo).*" Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 14, 1956. Letter no. 74.

letter to her sister, we observe Sara's description of her situation in the few months following her arrival in Powell River:

La vita (life) here involves eating, sleeping, and doing those odd household chores, not too many because the water is available inside the home, the laundry machine does the laundry in half an hour. There's ironing and making supper, while the bread, and groceries are delivered to the home. I don't need firewood for the kitchen, as everything is run by oil, so that kind of work is eliminated. All day I knit sweaters. I've started knitting some even for others, that's why I asked you for the magazines because I didn't bring any with me from Italy, not even one. I'm also widening my skirts and slips as none of my dresses fit me anymore, and I sleep every day from eight in the evening to nine in the morning. This is my life in Canada.⁸⁵

Compared to her life in Arcugnano, where she had been busy moving about every day, taking her children to the nursery, performing various chores, visiting friends and family and riding her bicycle to the town centre for various purchases, her description seems like a fairly comfortable existence for a married Italian woman. Or was it? In my view, her description of life in Powell River also reads like a gilded cage. Gone are the agency, decision-making and movement she exercised in Italy in the absence of her migrant husband. While the worries, concerns and frustrations she experienced in Arcugnano as a result of her husband's departure were numerous, she now faced a life enclosed within the walls of her home, in which her tasks were making supper, doing laundry and knitting sweaters. The family tensions that distressed her in Arcugnano were now far away, but she missed the pleasures that came from daily interactions with her other family members and friends.

⁸⁵ "La vita è di mangiare, dormire e fare quei quattro lavori di casa non tanti perche l'acqua l'ai in casa la macchina per lavare in una mezzora fai il bucato, stirare e far da mangiare il pane te lo portano a casa come pure la spesa, legna per la cucina; non ho da prepararle perche vanno a olio anche quella fatica e risparmiata tutto il giorno o di far maglie che ho incominciato anche per gli altri per quello ti ho domandato i giornali perche dall'Italia non me ne ho portati via neanche una, o di largar le sottane perche non mi va più bene neanche un vestito, e dormire tanto dalle otto di sera alle nove di mattina, ecco la vita che faccio in Canada." Letter from Dante del Moro and Sara Franceschetti to Luca Branchetti and Silvia Franceschetti, February 22, 1957. Letter no. 115.

The letter describing Sara's life in Powell River is significant for raising other gender issues as well. The availability of household *comodità* (amenities) such as automatic washing machines along with the household services that were delivered to her door, confirmed to Sara's sister (and her family) that the image of North American households that was disseminated on Italian television, magazines and cinema was accurate. A letter from Sara's niece illustrates the point: "how I would like to see your new little home, everything *all'Americana*, it must be a dream...".⁸⁶ This image of America was reinforced especially by working-class women who remained behind in Italy's agrotowns in the South and Northeast, as it stood in stark contrast to their lives that were immersed in the daily economic struggles of the postwar period. We observe then how the longing for domestic *comodità* was seen by Italian women as a step towards emancipation. However, these automatic household appliances and home delivery services also had a contradictory effect for an active, smart woman like Sara. While they freed her from endless hours of toiling (and paradoxically, increased expectations and standards of cleanliness), they also restricted her activities, her movement, her agency, and her contact with an outside world.⁸⁷ In doing so, her life in Powell River, as she described it in early 1957, had lost an important dimension by eliminating the possibility for engagement and self-realization outside of domestic chores. As she told her sister at the end of the letter with regards to their home's landlords, "they are good people, and

⁸⁶ "*come vorrei vedere la tua casetta nuova, tutto all'americana, immagino sarà un sogno...*" Letter from Lisa del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, January 6, 1957. Letter no. 118.

⁸⁷ Refer to Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Maxine L. Margolis. *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984).

they let me do whatever I want of the house.”⁸⁸ Indeed, she could do whatever she wanted, as long as she remained inside those walls.

We might be tempted to assume from Sara’s latter comment that despite constraints, she was neither passive nor powerless, and was instead able to exercise agency and self-realization through her gender roles as wife, mother, and *casalinga* (homemaker). While there is no question that the private sphere enabled women to exercise agency within the domestic realm, it is also true that their power as women remained limited to the private space. The sexual division of labour that was socially expected and actively enforced in a majority of Italian migrant households in postwar Canada underscored women’s roles in the private sphere and men’s roles in the public sphere. As I argued earlier in the chapter, this division of roles—perpetuated by both women and men by kin and co-villagers—also reinforced the gender subordination of women in the public sphere. Consequently, as Elson and Pearson argue, as women were identified in domestic terms, men were given access to social and economic power in the public sphere.⁸⁹ In her 1974 essay in *Woman, Culture and Society*, feminist anthropologist Michelle Z. Rosaldo raised an important point in relation to the meaning of women’s confinement in the domestic sphere. She argued that, “as long as the domestic sphere remains female, women’s societies, however powerful, will never be the political equivalents of men’s... .”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ “*sono brava gente e mi lasciano fare quello che voglio della casa.*” Letter from Dante del Moro and Sara Franceschetti to Luca Branchetti and Silvia Franceschetti, February 22, 1957. Letter no. 115.

⁸⁹ Elson and Pearson 154.

⁹⁰ Michelle Z. Rosaldo, “Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview,” *Woman, Culture & Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974) 42.

Yet, in postwar Canada's resource towns it was inevitable that women (including Italian women) would be associated with the domestic sphere. There were no industries (in the service and manufacturing sectors, for instance) that were geared for women's work—like Montreal or Toronto, as Franca Iacovetta documents in her study.⁹¹ In the towns of Powell River and Michel, British Columbia, despite the scarcity of female wage work, women worked as volunteers at the local church and women's associations (such as the Ladies' Pleasant Hour), as staff at the local stores and hotels, and as teachers and nurses.⁹² However, these were occupations that were seen as an extension of their reproductive roles. For Italian immigrant women whose gender roles, by convention, were even more narrowly defined than those available to Canadian-born women, the difficulties of finding employment (including language constraints) were especially apparent in Canada's resource towns. Their supportive social roles in Italian immigrant benevolent societies and regional associations were an extension of the roles they had “naturally” assumed.⁹³

We observe a similar gender dynamic in another scenario, in which Gianlorenzo's male friend needed help in cleaning his house in anticipation of his wife's arrival from Italy. In this letter, we learn that female kin and co-villagers were asked to help clean his

⁹¹ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* (1992). See also, Franca Iacovetta, “From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto 1947-62,” *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History*, ed. Jeant Burnet (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 195-222.

⁹² Arlene B. Gaal, ‘Memoirs’ of Michel-Natal, 1899-1971 (n.p.: 1971); Arlene B. Gaal, ‘Times to Remember...’ Michel-Natal, 1899-1980 (n.p.: 1980); and Tom Langford and Wayne Norton, eds. *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002).

⁹³ Refer to Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love: Three generations of women's work in the home* (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1980) ; Specifically concerning the mining towns of the Elk Valley in British Columbia and Alberta, see Tom Langford and Wayne Norton, eds. *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002).

house. In her letter to Gianlorenzo which includes news of friends and family in Michel, Arianna wrote: “Gabriella and I dropped by to clean Giacomo’s house. His wife is arriving on Wednesday this week. He has a nice house, not too big, but really quite pretty, and so Saturday, he’ll be having a party with friends.”⁹⁴ In this letter, she also remarked: “I’m now closing this letter as Giacomo and Mario want to play cards and they won’t let me continue writing. They send their greetings, and promise to write to you soon... affectionately, *tua cugina* (your cousin), Arianna.”⁹⁵ Several gender dynamics can be observed from these few lines. First, Gianlorenzo’s friend Giacomo was surrounded by both male and female friends. Second, the gender of the friends determined what roles they played in the community of Italian immigrant friends and kin in Michel. While Giacomo played cards with his male friends, including Mario and Arianna’s husband Carlo, Arianna played the proper female role and did the cleaning.

On the other side of the ocean, the sexual division of labour among transnational couples was equally reified and reinforced in postwar working-class Italy. In Giordano’s letters, we observe an idealized image of a married Ester, an image that Giordano hoped would be concretized upon her return to Italy. The gender role that he envisioned for her would require her to focus solely on tending to her husband’s needs and on raising children. This image of her cooking, cleaning and waiting for him stood in sharp contrast to the life Ester was actually leading in Canada, as a single working woman. Giordano wrote:

⁹⁴ “Io e Gabriella siamo state a pulire la casa di Giacomo che gli arriva la moglie mercoledì di questa settimana, ha una bella casetta, non grande ma è proprio bella e così Sabato fa una festa fra amici.” Letter from Arianna Cavallero to Gianlorenzo Colonello, September 12, 1954. Letter no. 6.

⁹⁵ “E ora chiudo perché è Giacomo e Mario che vogliono giocare alle carte e non mi lasciano scrivere, hanno detto che ti salutano e che ti scriveranno fra poco... affettuosamente, *cugina Arianna*.” Letter from Arianna Cavallero to Gianlorenzo Colonello, September 12, 1954. Letter no. 6.

Amore mio, ti amo tanto tanto (My love, I love you so so much), I want you to become my *cara* little *moglie*, how it would be beautiful to live together forever!! How it will be wonderful when I'll be returning home from work and I'll find my little Ester waiting for me at the window, or at the entrance door. Don't you think it will be lovely? I promise you an eternity of happiness. With you, I'll be the happiest man on earth.⁹⁶

While Giordano's vision of a happily married woman circumscribed and infantilized Ester within the confines of her home, he also imagined his relationship involving shared confidences and emotional intimacy with her:

between *marito* and *moglie* (even if, future), there needs to be an understanding. Don't you think so? You too, if you've got a worry or something that's bothering you, write to me about it. Maybe I'll be able to give you some advice on it. Try to be more open with me. Don't be so shy!! Because one day, when we'll be married, we won't be keeping secrets from each other, do you understand?⁹⁷

In other words, we can surmise that Giordano wanted his wife not only to serve him, but also to be happy and content while she performed her domestic subservient role. Once again, the question: what more could a married woman possibly desire in life, other than to be a "domestic queen" or *Signora* comes to mind. Indeed, a working-class Italian married woman could be a *Signora* as long as she embraced her roles as wife and mother and confined her aspirations and agency within the domestic unit.

⁹⁶ "Amore mio ti amo tanto tanto, voglio che tu diventi la mia cara mogliettina, come sarebbe bello vivere per sempre insieme!! come sarà bello quando tornerò a casa dopo il lavoro e troverò la mia piccola Ester che mi attende alla finestra o sulla soglia della porta, non ti sembra che sia bello? ti prometto una eterna felicità, con te sarò l'uomo più felice di questa terra; ora basta con questi sogni prematuri; ma mi piace tanto farli; non ti farò più arrabbiare domandandoti se mi vorrai bene in seguito, poiché ne sono certo." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 2, 1957. Letter no. 413.

⁹⁷ "tra marito e moglie (anche se futuri) ci deve essere un'intesa, non ti pare? Anche tu se hai qualche pensiero o qualcosa che non ti va come dovrebbe andare, scrivimelo, forse ti potrò dare qualche consiglio, cerca di avere più confidenza con me, non essere così timida!! poiché un giorno quando saremo sposati non dovremo avere nessun segreto l'uno per l'altro, intesi??" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 5, 1956. Letter no. 356.

Of course, one way of fulfilling a young woman's dream of becoming a *Signora* was through migration and the achievement of economic success through her husband's breadwinning capacities in *America*. Perhaps the significance of this dream to young Italian migrant women can best be summarized in Vittoria Ranellucci's words, from the documentary-film, *Caff  Italia, Montreal*: "je voulais  tre une beau [sic] dame, riche comme je voyais les riches en Italie, je veux dire, je voulais moi aussi  tre comme  a... ."98

The domestic wife image that Giordano harboured of his Italian migrant sweetheart also involved having babies, as he wrote:

I went to visit your family and the little Alessandra. How beautiful she is, I thought a lot about that day when our *figlio* will be the one in the stroller!!! He too will be very beautiful, especially if he'll look like his *madre*!! Think what a lovely child he will be!! Slit-eyed with a sweet smile on his lips, like yours. He'll have CURLY hair like his *madre*, or rather like yours! If our first should be a girl, then I hope with all my heart that she'll resemble you! Do you know why? Because you are simply beautiful.⁹⁹

The prevailing image that women were natural mothers, and that maternity was necessarily a central, if not the major part of their destiny as it fulfilled an important part of their gender roles was also reified and reinforced in the narratives of migration. Migrant women's kin contributed significantly in reinforcing women's roles, not only because maternity was viewed as a natural consequence of a happy, married life for women, but also because it was hoped that babies and children in immigrant households

⁹⁸ "Caff  Italia, Montr al." Dir. Paul Tana; prod. ACPAV, Montreal, 1984.

⁹⁹"sono andato a trovare i tuoi e ho visto la piccola Alessandra, che bella che  , ho pensato tanto a quel giorno che in una carrozzella ci sar  il nostro figlio!!! anche lui sar  molto bello, specialmente se assomglier  alla madre!! pensa che bel bambino che sar !! cogli occhi alla cinese, con un sorriso dolce sulle labbra come il tuo, poi coi capelli RICCI come quelli della sua madre, o meglio come i tuoi!! poi se il nostro primo sar  di sesso femminile, allora spero con tutto il cuore che ti assomigli!! lo sai perch ?? perch  tu sei bellissima!" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 12, 1956. Letter no. 376.

would help channel married women's nurturing energies to their natural roles. In addition, a woman's kin also hoped that babies would help distract her and thus alleviate feelings of nostalgia and loneliness that came with leaving her friends and family behind. We observe these gender dynamics in several letters in this life-stories collection.

For example, in December 1960, soon after arriving in Montreal, Maddalena received news from her godmother relaying how her family and friends were doing and reassuring Maddalena that they had not forgotten her. In her Christmas and New Year's wishes to Maddalena, her godmother wrote: "may 1961 bring you many beautiful things, lots of joy and prosperity, and foremost, a beautiful *pupone*,"¹⁰⁰ that is, a beautiful, healthy baby. Indeed, in the eyes of her godmother as well as other friends and family, there was nothing else a recently married emigrant woman like Maddalena could possibly desire—especially, in light of the emotional void she had been experiencing as a result of leaving her immediate family behind.

Not surprisingly, many of these views were encapsulated in the correspondence that Maddalena received from her mother. Upon receiving news from her daughter that she was pregnant, Maddalena's mother was clearly delighted, and immediately responded encouragingly by writing: "I'm very happy and I send you again my most fervent, joyful wishes, try to *sopportare* (withstand) the troubles you're feeling to the best that you can, because *essere mamma* (to be a mother) brings enormous satisfaction."¹⁰¹ Both the mother and godmother of Maddalena reiterated the same message: to be mother is a

¹⁰⁰"*possa il 1961 arrecarvi tante cose belle, gioia e prosperità e soprattutto un bel pupone.*" Letter from Adriana Sansoni to Maddalena Franchi, December 14, 1960. Letter no. 183.

¹⁰¹"*sono molto felice e ti rinnovo i più sinceri auguri, con gioia, cerca di sopportare i disturbi che hai perché essere mamma è una grande soddisfazione.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, January 10, 1961. Letter no. 205.

natural destiny for a woman. In addition to fulfilling normal feminine desires, however, they also counselled that a child would mitigate the nostalgia and loneliness Maddalena had been experiencing as a result of being so far away from her loved ones in Italy.

Apart from fulfilling their own emotional needs, however, women in transnational households also played a key role in helping to make up emotionally for the absence of their children's father. As Parrenas observes, in the absence of a migrant father, forms of "intensive mothering" became normalized in the daily lives of transnational households.¹⁰² We observe this dynamic in the letters exchanged between Sara and Dante, as Sara wrote: "I asked for a loan so that I could buy some sweets for them [Paolo and Elisabetta], not for me, but for them. I'm not ashamed of saying it. I've spoiled them, I know that, but don't reproach me. They are without a *padre*, and therefore, it seems something is always missing...".¹⁰³ Indeed, while the presence of both parents was seen as important in a child's life, the implication is that, in the context of migration the mother's presence was more necessary to the children's emotional and psychological well-being than the father's. In the absence of other forms of communication between the children and their father, treats and sweets would, at least, keep the children in a positive frame of mind.

Gender roles for women in transnational households were also reconfigured in order for them to serve their kin, especially their male kin, as we witness in an illustration below. The hope and expectation that an older daughter would also serve as mother to her

¹⁰² Parrenas, *Children of Global Migration* 84-87.

¹⁰³ "sono andata in prestito per loro [Paolo e Elisabetta] per comperargli i dolci per me no, ma per loro si, non me ne vergogno di dirlo, li ho abituati un po male, questo lo so ma non rimproverarmi perché senza papà, mi par sempre che gli manchi qualcosa..." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 25, 1956. Letter no. 96.

younger adult brother, for instance is emphasized in the letters between Maddalena and her mother. On the eve of the departure of her younger brother, Maddalena's mother wrote a letter and entrusted her son to bring it to Maddalena upon arriving in Montreal. She wrote: "*Cara figlia*, I entrust you with Fabio, as a *fratello*, *cognato*, and as *figlio*. Try to guide him in every way and advise him as you know how."¹⁰⁴ The request to be a mother to her brother was nothing new for Maddalena. In fact, in a letter from Fabio, written a few months prior to his arrival in Canada, we observe how Maddalena had accepted and welcomed the anticipation of seeing her brother in Montreal, while asking her mother to ensure that Fabio would listen to his older sister. In the process of planning his migration to Canada and preparing the necessary paperwork for him to join his sister, Fabio wrote to Maddalena reassuring her that he would work at the same location where she was working and that, "with regards to what you're telling *mamma*, I'll do whatever you ask me to do, and I can say that even though we are brother and sister, you'll be my second *madre*."¹⁰⁵ For Maddalena, however, the pressure was felt both ways, as she was also expected to remain a comfort to her mother back home. "Write often to *mamma*, she is usually alone," her older brother implored her, "and even if Fabio is with her for those few hours, they are never enough to fill those empty days she now has since you left."¹⁰⁶ The special responsibility thrust on women for the care of their parents was also reflected

¹⁰⁴ "*Cara figlia*, vi affido Fabio oltre come fratello e cognato ed anche come figlio, cerca di seguirlo in tutti i modi e consigliarlo come sai fare tu." Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, February 5, 1966. Letter no. 236.

¹⁰⁵ "*di quanto dici a mamma farò quello che tu dirai e posso dirti anche se siamo fratelli, sarai per me una seconda madre*." Letter from Fabio Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, July 16, 1965. Letter no. 340.

¹⁰⁶ "*scrivere spesso a mamma, praticamente lei è rimasta sola e anche se Fabio è vicino a lei, quelle poche ore, non saranno mai abbastanza perché possa colmarle le giornate vuote che si è venuta a trovare con la partenza*." Letter from Davide Franchi to Maddalena Franchi, November 22, 1960. Letter no. 181.

in a brief exchange between two sisters-in-law, one in Italy, the other in Montreal: “don’t worry about your mother, she is well taken care of, and everyone loves her. I visited her to give her my best wishes... There’s always a family member with her... ”¹⁰⁷

The reconfiguration of women’s roles within kinship also figures in other contexts of migration. For instance, in the following scenario a migrant’s aunt is asked to be like a mother to a woman’s son. In a letter written by Marianna Domenica to her son, Gianlorenzo, we witness her reaction when he decided to break free from his aunt’s maternal protection. She wrote: “no kinder and more caring woman exists. I tell you the truth, Gianlorenzo, I thought you would stay with her for as long as you would be away... ”¹⁰⁸ Although Gianlorenzo had, no doubt, mentioned to his parents in Spilimbergo that he would be living with his uncle and his family in Montreal, nonetheless, the message that resonated the strongest, especially with his mother was that he was leaving the safety and nurturing care of his aunt in Michel. By contrast, the realities that Gianlorenzo would still be under the care of family in Montreal, and that he would gain higher earnings through his new job in the construction industry, and that he was leaving behind a dangerous mining job was not emphasized to the same degree.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “*non pensare per tua mamma, lei è bene tratata e tutti le voliano bene, sono stata a farle i auguri... a sempre qualcuno dei suoi...* ” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Nives Fama, April 25, 1961. Letter no. 45.

¹⁰⁸ “*non ce una brava donna piu di lei e buona ti dico il vero, Gianlorenzo io avrei creduto che tu stasi sempre con lei fino che avevi piacere a stare via...* ” Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, July 28, 1954. Letter no. 21.

¹⁰⁹ In Italian transnational households, other female roles are also observed in a process of reconfiguration, including, for instance, the role that changed from cousin to sister, as we read in a letter from Daniela Perini to her daughter, urging her to stay close to her female cousin in Montreal: “I hope that you are close to each other, and that you see each other often, given that Giovanna is like a sister to you... ” (“*voglio sperare che state vicino e che vi vedete spesso, datosi che Giovanna è come una sorella per te...* ”) Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, October 28, 1961. Letter no. 204.

Canada's postwar immigration policy, specifically through the Sponsorship Program, played a large part in shaping the gender construction of postwar Italian migration. Given the cultural-historical context of the time period, the norm that a wife would necessarily follow her husband wherever he migrated is not surprising. Although it would be misleading to ignore the agency that women enjoyed in helping to influence the decision-making process of their husbands' migration projects, the prevailing message in the letters I examine demonstrates that the social and cultural expectations placed on wives gave them very little choice in matters.

We read an illustration of this dynamic in a letter from Silvia Franceschetti written soon after her sister Sara had left for Canada. In describing the void she felt as she looked around her empty home, Silvia wrote: "I imagined this would happen from the day Dante left, the *moglie* follows her *marito* even to the end of the earth, as I always told you."¹¹⁰ This message was also strongly conveyed to Maddalena Franchi by both her mother and her godmother soon after she arrived in Montreal. In her first letter to her daughter, Daniela Perini described her happiness and relief at knowing that her daughter had arrived safely (despite her evident sorrow in being separated from her daughter). Towards the end of the letter, however, she gave Maddalena some motherly advice, and suggested that now that she was married and surrounded by a new family: "*Cara figlia...* I ask you to be *buona e brava* (good and kind),¹¹¹ like you have always been with your

¹¹⁰ "questo lo immaginavo più da quando è partito Dante, che la moglie segue il marito anche nel punto più lontano della terra come ti ho sempre detto." Letter from Silvia Franceschetti to Sara Franceschetti, November 13, 1956. Letter no. 105.

¹¹¹ In her essay, "The Metonymic Definition of the Female and the Concept of Honour Among Italian Immigrant Families in Toronto," Harriet Perry offers a definition of what "good" means in relation to a young woman's roles in Italian family households in postwar Toronto. She remarks: "A 'good' girl is one reputed to be chaste, obedient to her father, and knowledgeable about the running of a household. It is a great bonus if the girl is considered intelligent and if at school she has gained certain practical skills that

madre, and to respect your *genitori* (parents), and to love your *marito*, because happiness in life comes only through loving each other.”¹¹² These words of advice from mother to daughter deserve attention. Similar to Dante’s words of encouragement written to his wife in the first letter we encounter at the beginning of this chapter,¹¹³ the words articulated by Maddalena’s mother can also be seen as benevolent and well-intentioned. However, when we examine them through a gender lens, it seems that the message is quite simple: personal happiness for an Italian woman was only attainable through the fulfillment of her gender roles performed within the institution of marriage.

Maddalena’s mother was not the only correspondent in her life to encourage the development of affective bonds between her and her new family. In her Christmas wishes letter, Maddalena’s godmother wrote: “try to make them love you more with each passing day, and you will not regret leaving behind your homeland and your family in order to create your own family so far away from your loved ones. Now your place is with your *marito*.”¹¹⁴ These words of advice from a mother and godmother could not be easily ignored by Maddalena, especially when we consider that the letters that Maddalena had

will be helpful to her in getting a job. Secretarial, dressmaking, and hairdressing skills are the most common, not least because they can to some extent be done in the home after marriage and motherhood, and also because part-time jobs are possible in these occupations.” Harriet Perry, *The Metonymic Definition of the Female and the Concept of Honour Among Italian Immigrant Families in Toronto*, *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America*, eds. Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney, and Lydio F. Tomasi (Toronto: the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1978) 225.

¹¹²“*Cara figlia.... Ti raccomando di essere buona e brava come sei sempre stata con tua madre e di rispettare i tuoi genitori e di voler bene a tuo marito, perché nella vita l'unica felicità è volersi bene.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, November 22, 1960. Letter no. 180.

¹¹³ “*Mia cara... I hope you will be happy here and thankful...*” Cf. letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

¹¹⁴ “*cerca di farti volere ogni giorno più bene e non ti pentirai di avere lasciato la tua patria e la tua famiglia per formartene una nuova tanto lontano da tutti i tuoi cari, ora il tuo posto è accanto a tuo marito.*” Letter from Adriana Sansoni to Maddalena Franchi, December 14, 1960. Letter no. 183.

received from her family were the only source of communication she had maintained with them. As a result, the content and message in the letters carried enormous meaning. While it is reasonable to assume that Maddalena experienced enormous loneliness and nostalgia once she arrived in Montreal (based on her mother's responses in the exchange), we can surmise that many of those feelings remained buried within her as she became aware over time that neither her mother nor her godmother could help her negotiate the sorrows of migration. Further, while this advice was well-intentioned, it also placed a large part of the responsibility on Maddalena to ensure that positive, affectionate bonds had developed between her, her husband and her in-laws. Finally, these excerpts are helpful in underscoring the significance of kinship in reinforcing normative gender behaviour in transnational households.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

Private letters of ordinary women and men engaged in the throes of migration mirrored deeply gendered universes, both in the productive and reproductive spheres. As I have shown, migration profoundly shaped the letter-writers' lives, especially as the physical ruptures induced through migration became a reality that forced them to negotiate their fears, uncertainties and difficulties.

By responding to the dangers of migration through the reification and reinforcement of gender roles, Italian women and men who settled in Canada in the postwar period also sought to valorize and entrench within their families a set of

¹¹⁵ Refer to Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Children of Globalization: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 92-140.

sociocultural conservative values, morals and behaviours. The anchor of these values was family unity. And, in order to consistently maintain their families united under “traditional” values and expectations, Italian families in Canada felt compelled to maintain a firm grip on the morals, traditions and norms of behaviour they had learned as children in Italy.

In other words, migration had an indirect yet, extremely profound effect on the lives of Italian migrants and their children in postwar Canada. It worked to accentuate and preserve a patriarchal understanding of family life that was difficult to challenge.

Chapter Four: “My dearest love...”¹ Emotions at a Distance

*Amore mio,
last night upon returning home, with great joy I found your lettera
No. 4. I didn't expect you to write to me so soon! You see! I also write
to you often. I am so happy when you declare your love for me. I too
love you so so much, and I want to marry you as soon as possible! ...
I can't wait for you to be with me per sempre (forever)....*²

Introduction

My first reading of the letters in the collections opened an unexpected path of discovery as I was immediately struck by the dynamic range and emotional intensity.

While it seems logical to assume that the process of migration was emotionally wrenching for all concerned, the literature on migration studies has shown limited interest in exploring the plethora of feelings that were intrinsic to the experience of migration.³

One reason for the dearth of studies is the inaccessibility of documents, such as letters, that are most likely to reveal the private emotional realms of the immigrants. According

¹ “*Carissimo amore...*” This expression is frequently used in the letters of Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, 1957 to 1960.

² “*Amore mio, ieri sera tornando a casa, con grande gioia ho trovato la tua lettera No. 4 non mi aspettavo che tu mi scrivessi così presto! Vedi! Anch'io ti scrivo spesso, mi piace tanto quando mi dichiari il tuo amore, anch'io ti amo tanto tanto e voglio sposarti al più presto!... non vedo l'ora di averti vicino (per sempre)...*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 28, 1957. Letter no. 380.

³ William Reddy offers several reasons for the scholarly lacunae in the study of emotions and suggests: “For a long time, our common sense supported a certain division of labor among the disciplines that assigned emotions to the sphere of psychology. But this is not the whole explanation for their neglect... .” (316) and examines the contribution of anthropologists, including M. Rosaldo, C. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod, and studies by historians and literary critics, whose feminist concerns impelled them to examine emotions as well. William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 318.

to historian David Gerber, “the typical archived immigrant letter was to parents, siblings and friends.”⁴ Moreover, he explains that:

Immigrants probably wrote love letters, the privacy of which was widely understood to be inviolable, but none of these survives in the archived collections on which this study is based, probably for the reason that they were never intended to be seen by anyone but the addressee... Whatever their wishes in the matter, immigrant letter-writers could never be sure that thoughts committed to paper in these letters would not ultimately become public.⁵

Beyond the challenge of locating letters, however, John Willis points out that another reason why these documents are seldom used by historians is because their content are deemed to be too personal: “Passion is an extreme example of epistolary communication that is almost too hot to handle.”⁶ Yet, precisely because they are “too hot to handle,” these writings crystallize in no uncertain terms the experiences and struggles to make sense of migration that immigrants and their families felt.

As William Reddy observes, the study of emotions has produced a number of works cutting across various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including psychology, anthropology, history and literary studies.⁷ As historian Barbara Rosenwein observes in a review essay, the study of emotions in history began with Lucien Febvre’s article published in *Les Annales d’histoire sociale*⁸ in 1941. In recent decades, Carol

⁴ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 108.

⁵ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 107-108.

⁶ Willis 83.

⁷ Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* x.

⁸ The essay’s contribution rests on the legitimation of the emotionally childlike Middle Ages. Refer to Lucien Febvre, “La sensibilité et l’histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d’autrefois.” *Les Annales d’histoire sociale* 3 (January-June 1941): 5-20. Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107.3 (June 2002): 823-824.

Stearns and Peter Stearns have also contributed to the study of emotions with their formulation of the concept of “emotionology,” defined as “attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression; ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct... .”⁹ The premise that emotions are inter-related with their expression and that these elements interact dynamically was also developed by psychologists, Margaret Clark and Pheobe Ellsworth in recent decades.¹⁰ Reddy’s suggestion “that this one aspect of emotional expression is universal...”¹¹ is explored throughout his study demonstrating, “how this small concession to universalism is sufficient to ground both historical explanation and a defence of human liberty.”¹² Perhaps, it is no coincidence that Reddy’s conceptualization of emotions has been drawn from “threads of the many conversations” he had in the 1970s with feminist anthropologist, Michelle Z. Rosaldo. In

⁹ Peter N. Stearns with Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards.” *American Historical Review* 90.4 (1985): 813-835.

¹⁰ Reddy observes that contemporary psychologists, Margaret Clark and Phoebe Ellsworth have explored the link between emotions and emotional expression and how the two elements interact dynamically. Interestingly, he also draws on an observation made by Germaine de Stael in her book, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (Paris: Flammarion, 1800, 1991) In this work, De Stael argues “that reading novels allowed people to have new, more nuanced, feelings.” Cited in William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* xii.

¹¹ Reddy, xii. Other works contributing to the discussion on the universality or not of emotions include: William M. Reddy, “Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions,” *Current Anthropology* 30.3 (June 1997): 327-351; William Jankowiak, ed. *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Michelle Z. Rosaldo. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Michelle Z. Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,” *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, eds. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-lughod, eds. *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey M. White. “The Anthropology of Emotions,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 405-436; Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: the Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); and Laura M. Ahearn, *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, & Social Change in Nepal* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

¹² Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* xii.

her monograph, *Knowledge and Passion* (1980), we “learn of the meaning of Ilongot headhunting raids and rites by focusing on... the emotional language Ilongots use in explaining how and why such violent deeds engaged their interest.”¹³ As Rosaldo suggests, the ways that emotions work, in reference, for instance, to the emotion of shame depend “on socially dictated ways of reckoning the claims of selves and the demands of situations.”¹⁴ In other words, emotions are socially constructed. Through Rosaldo’s work, as Lutz and Abu-Lughod writing a decade later suggest, the implications that “culturally variable ideas about emotion... have for social behaviour and social relations”¹⁵ are underscored. The series of articles produced by Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod and their colleagues,¹⁶ draw from Rosaldo’s theory on emotions, and further expand the discipline’s conceptualization of emotions.¹⁷ In particular, their co-edited work, *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (1990) charts new ground by demonstrating, “that the sociocultural analysis of emotion is both feasible and important and ...[suggesting] new ways of going about it.”¹⁸

¹³ Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion* 27.

¹⁴ Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology” 149.

¹⁵ Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, “Introduction,” *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, eds. Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 4.

¹⁶ See Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey M. White. “The Anthropology of Emotions,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 405-436; Catherine Lutz, “Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotion as a Cultural Category,” *Cultural Anthropology* 1.3 (Aug. 1986): 287-309; and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

¹⁷ On the complex question of the universality or not of emotions, see Catherine Lutz, “Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotion as a Cultural Category,” *Cultural Anthropology* 1.3 (Aug. 1986) in which Lutz argues that, “The cultural meaning system that constitutes the concept of emotion has been invisible because we have assumed that it is possible to identify the essence of emotion, that the emotions are universal, and that they are separable from both their personal and social contexts.” Lutz, “Emotion, Thought and Estrangement” 288.

¹⁸ Lutz and Abu-Lughod, “Introduction” 1.

The juxtaposition of emotions and political economy is the terrain on which Nancy Scheper-Hughes develops her theory about maternal love and death in a Brazilian shantytown, in her book, *Death without Weeping* (1992). In her analysis of maternal thinking, Scheper-Hughes challenges the “universality” of maternal bonding and love between mother and child, and argues that “Mother love is anything other than natural and instead represents a matrix of images, meanings, sentiments, and practices that are everywhere socially and culturally produced.”¹⁹

In her book, *Servants of Globalization* (2001) the anthropologist Rhacel Parrenas has examined the intersections between emotions and migration in her study of how Filipino domestic workers navigate their roles as women, mothers and workers. Parrenas examines four key dislocations or narratives of displacement that migrant Filipino women domestic workers face in Rome and Los Angeles: partial citizenship, the pain of family separation, contradictory class mobility, and non-belonging.²⁰ She also considers the emotional and gender dynamics that migrant women are engaged in, and the effects of migration on their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

Likewise, Jennifer Hirsch’s recent work on courtship and love after marriage in transnational Mexican families also examines emotions by exploring the gender ideals of young women and men in Mexico and the United States.²¹ The themes of transnational

¹⁹ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: the Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) 341. Indeed, through the work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes, we learn that love, like grieving are socially constructed emotions that are dependent on the context (social, economic, political, cultural) of the actors through which these emotions are experienced.

²⁰ Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization* 23.

²¹ Jennifer S. Hirsch. *A Courtship after Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003). The theme of courtship, love and marriage is further developed on a wider, global stage through her co-edited work with Holly Wardlow,

courtship, marriage and love are further explored by Nicole Constable in her study, *Romance on a Global Stage* (2003). In her critical reading of correspondence relationships between U.S. men and Filipino and Chinese women in relation to history and political economy, she also shows the “way in which men and women involved in correspondence relationships articulate a discourse on romantic love and its importance to their relationships... .”²² The theme of courtship is developed further in Laura Ahearn’s ethnography of love and social change in Nepal, based on the exchange of love letters.²³ In *Invitations to Love* (2001), Ahearn examines the emotions of romantic love in courtship and marriage between young couples in relation to social development in Nepali villages. Through love correspondence, meanings of love and marriage are transformed by these couples as they attempt to break from the traditions of arranged and capture marriages. Through their emotions expressed on paper, we learn how romantic love becomes a force in the development and transformation of young women and men in the social life of their villages.

Over the past two decades there have also been several works that examine the study of emotions as reflected through personal correspondence. These contributions explore the dynamics and meanings of emotions in correspondence by analysing the

Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

²² Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* 117. Refer also to Nicole Constable’s recent anthology, *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). See also, Suzanne Sinke, “Marriage through the Mail: North American Correspondence Marriage from Early Print to the Web,” *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, eds. Bruce Elliott, David Gerber and Suzanne Sinke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) 75-96.

²³ Laura M. Ahearn, *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, & Social Change in Nepal* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

content of the letters and underscoring key methodological concerns about the source, that is, the letter (Jabour 1998, Hanna 2003, 2006, French 2003, and Nelson 2004).²⁴

Historians, for instance, have examined the personal correspondence of well and lesser-known individuals with an emphasis on prevailing emotions in epistolary exchanges analysed as part of the fabric of a historical narrative. Interwoven in the historical discussions are the social, cultural and political significance of the letter collections studied, and the specificity of their contents and contexts.²⁵ Karen Lystra's insightful work, *Searching the Heart* (1989) examines the inter-connections between love correspondence, courtship and marriage in Victorian middle-class America.²⁶

Literary critic, Janet Gurkin Altman's work, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (1982)²⁷ has been influential in studies of literary critics, namely Favret (1993), Redford (1986), Albertine (1992), Lyons (1999) and Decker (1998).²⁸ In turn, the French school of

²⁴ Anya Jabour, " 'The Language of Love': The Letters of Elizabeth and William Wirt, 1802-1834," *A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender*, eds. Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) 119-140; Martha Hanna, "A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I," *American Historical Review* 108.5 (Dec. 2003): 1338-1361; Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, Engl.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Robert K. Nelson, " 'The Forgetfulness of Sex': Devotion and Desire in the Courtship Letters of Angelina Grimke and Theodore Dwight Weld," *Journal of Social History* 37.3 (2004): 663-679; William E. French, " 'Te Amo Muncho': The Love Letters of Pedro and Enriqueta," *The Human Tradition in Mexico*, ed. Jeffrey M. Pilcher (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003) 123-135.

²⁵ Refer also to the ethnography: Niko Besnier, *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On the intersections between letter-writing and social practice, consider: David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds. *Letter-writing as a Social Practice* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).

²⁶ Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁷ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics & the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Susan Albertine, "Heart's Expression: the Middle-Class Language of Love in Late Nineteenth-Century Correspondence," *American Literary History* 4.1 (Spring, 1992): 141-164; Martyn Lyons, "Love Letters

literary theorists has been instrumental in raising methodological and conceptual concerns specific to epistolary communication. For instance, the notion of the epistolary pact, referred to as, “le pacte, plus ou moins explicite,[qui] amène la personne signataire à se saisir d’outils rhétoriques pour mener à bien la rencontre avec l’autre... la lettre scelle l’engagement de soi dans la relation à l’autre,”²⁹ was conceptualized by literary theorist, Cécile Dauphin.

The time dimension in letters is examined by both Altman and Dauphin. Altman conceives the notion of “temporal polyvalence”³⁰ in epistolary communication by observing the interplay between the present, future and past tenses. As we will observe in the letters I have examined, temporal polyvalence is identified according to Altman’s description: “Memory, imagination, and hope make of past and future the only living present for the letter-writer separated from the lover, visible in the very oscillation between past and future tenses.”³¹ In contrast, Dauphin conceives “le temps épistolaire”³² to reflect the temporal dynamics at play in the process of reading, writing and receiving correspondence. Over the past decades, the works of Dauphin (1991, 1995), Bossis (1986, 1990, 1994), Grassi (1986, 1990), Chartier (1991), and other French scholars have also

and Writing Practices: On *Écritures Intimes* in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Family History* 24 (1999): 232-239; and William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter-writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

²⁹ Cécile Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pezzerat, D. Pouban. *Ces bonnes lettres: Une correspondance familiale au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1995) 131.

³⁰ Altman 131.

³¹ Altman 131.

³² Cécile Dauphin, “Les manuels épistolaires au XIX^e siècle,” *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris: Fayard, 1991) 209-272.

contributed to the study of personal correspondence by expanding the analytical parameters of ordinary individuals' letters.³³

On the dynamics of correspondence written in a context of migration, the two most important studies are Constable's *Romance on a Global Stage* (2003) and Gerber's *Authors of their Lives* (2006). Through their innovative analytical approaches and conceptual frameworks, both these works chart new territory in migration studies. As observed earlier, Constable's work involves personal correspondence via the internet, while Gerber's study examines letters of family and friends. Both of these works crystallize social, cultural, historical and emotional dynamics that are interwoven in personal correspondence conceived in a process of migration in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the postwar wave of mass migration from Italy to Canada, letter-writing was the most popular vehicle through which relationships could be maintained and endured over time. As a result, despite the respect for letter-writing conventions and mutual understandings that were sustained throughout the correspondences, letter-writers in the context of migration revealed themselves as human beings reaching out to loved ones and negotiating with pen and paper the spatial and temporal distances separating them.

Although my discussion in this chapter draws from the studies of Constable and Gerber, I also draw on the term emotional "energies" borrowed from Altman (1982) to discuss the multiplicity of feelings reflected in the letters. At the same time, however, I am aware, as

³³ Consider, for instance, Mireille Bossis (and Charles Porter), eds. *L'Épistolarité à Travers les Siècles: Geste de communication et/ou d'écriture* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990); Roger Chartier, ed. *La Correspondance: Les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Mireille Bossis (and Charles A. Porter), ed. *La lettre à la croisée de l'individuel et du social* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1994); Cécile Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pezérat, and D. Pouban, *Ces bonnes lettres: Une correspondance familiale au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1995); In 1986, the journal *Yale French Studies* published a special issue on personal correspondence, entitled, "Men/Women of Letters" 71.

David Gerber observes, that there are dangers in reading these letters as “a pure and unmediated expression of folk consciousness that somehow can speak for themselves.”³⁴

As Roger Chartier observes, “les unes et les autres, dans le monde bourgeois qui est le leur, connaissent les normes et les conventions qui doivent gouverner la rédaction de toute lettre. Mais tous et toutes savent aussi que l’art épistolaire implique, non l’imitation bésogneuse de modèles scrupuleusement respectées, mais l’aisance et le naturel.”³⁵ As a result, despite Martyn Lyons’s reservations about personal letters whose writings, he suggests contain “tactical objectives” and thus, “must be treated as highly coded forms,”³⁶ the personal letters I have collected and examined share some common elements with the other forms of family correspondence and love letters examined by Dauphin, Chartier, Bossis and Grassi.³⁷

The chapter is divided in two parts: Part one examines the emotional energies that resonated in the letters as individuals negotiated the pains of separation that followed from the process of migration. Because letters were the principle means of keeping the bonds of kinship alive, they were often highly charged and intimate texts. Part two

³⁴ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 46.

³⁵ Roger Chartier, “Préface,” *Ces bonnes lettres: Une correspondance familiale au XIXe siècle*, C. Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pezérat and D. Pouban (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1995).

³⁶ Lyons 233.

³⁷ As I suggested earlier, part of the emphasis in the works of Altman (1981), Lyons (1999), Albertine (1992), Favret (1993), as well as Dauphin (1991, 1995), Grassi (1986, 1990), and Bossis (1990, 1994) for instance, rests on the private letters exchanged between lovers and loved ones (as kin and nonkin members) from the 17th to the 19th centuries. While these studies examine epistolary exchanges NOT prompted by migration—and as a result the contextual difference of the sources cannot be underestimated-- these studies have been instrumental in understanding some of the complexities and dynamics of personal letters in light of long- and short-distance communication, as well as in the practice of letter-writing within and without the context of migration, as historian Gerber (2006) shows in his references to a number of these works.

examines the love letter as a specific form of epistolary exchange between individuals separated by migration.

A) Emotional Energies and the Notion of Rupture in the Letters of Parents and Children

In the following section, I explore the dynamics and consequences of rupture as reflected in the correspondence of kin members in four family networks: a mother and father in Spilimbergo writing to their son, Gianlorenzo Colonello; the correspondence between two young children in Arcugnano, Vicenza and their father, Dante del Moro in Powell River; the letters of a mother in Ascoli Piceno to her daughter in Montreal; and the correspondence of a mother and father writing from Venice and Cipressina to their son and daughter-in-law in Montreal.

The focus of my discussion is on the emotional energies that pervaded the personal correspondence of these four family networks. Analyzing the content and context of the letters particular to each kin network, I suggest that the notion of rupture and separation was negotiated differently in emotional terms based on whether or not the migration of a loved one was perceived as permanent by family members (parents and children) who remained behind. By bringing to light the emotional responses to rupture and separation as they were experienced in a process of migration, I hope to better understand the emotional impact of migration on migrants and loved ones.

In the article, "Men without Women," (1978) Robert Harney examines the impact of separation on Italian male migrants in Canada. Anthropologist Caroline Brettell followed with life story descriptions of Portuguese female migrants in France, through

her study, *We Have Already Cried Many Tears* (1982).³⁸ The studies of Harney and Brettell share a common thread: both examine the impact of separation from the viewpoint of migrants. On the impact of separation experienced by family members who remained behind, Linda Reeder's *Widows in White* (2003) discusses the image of suffering Sicilian women perceived as abandoned in the wake of their husbands' migration (see also Brettell 1986). More central to my argument, however, is Rhacel Parrenas's recent ethnography on Filipina domestic workers, *Servants of Globalization* (2001). In this study, Parrenas explores the pains of separation experienced in transnational households both by female migrant domestic workers and by their children who remained behind in the Philippines.

Similar to the earlier wave of Italian mass migration in the early 20th century, postwar migration from Italy to Canada was in many households perceived as permanent—a situation in which the young migrant did not anticipate returning to his or her homeland. For loved ones, this signalled a permanent and definitive separation that was analogous to death. Part of the reason for this perspective, despite the acceleration in transportation and communication technologies in the postwar period, was the high level of anxiety that migration to Canada entailed for migrants and their families. By contrast, for those who viewed migration as part of a family strategy, like Dante del Moro and Sara Franceschetti, who experienced temporary separation, the departure and absence of the migrant was viewed in tandem with the imminent anticipation of family reunification. In this analysis, I explore how rupture and separation were experienced in light of the temporary or permanent migration of a loved one. Migration emotions are analysed in

³⁸ Caroline Brettell, *We Have Already Cried Many Tears: Portuguese Women and Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1982).

relation to the following themes: love and nostalgia; emotional dependency; the imagination; time and space conceptions; “bridging” efforts; and the overall meaning of being left behind. In addition to the letters of Dante and Sara, other letter-series relevant to the discussion are the letters of Maurizio Trevisan, Maddalena Franchi, and Gianlorenzo Colonello, which offer windows into emotions experienced as a result of permanent migration.

Marie-Claire Grassi suggests that, “entre parents et enfants se tisse un amour non plus charnel mais viscéral qui s’écrit dans le langage de l’émotion.”³⁹ My question is: How was this visceral love between parents and children transformed in the face of separations induced through migration? And how different is the expression of love and nostalgia in the wake of the realities of permanent and temporary separation? For many mothers and fathers, the migration of their children was similar to death because their migration was viewed as permanent, and the separation between them would subsequently be understood as forever. For male migrants who left behind their wives and children, migration was experienced as a temporary rupture that would need to be negotiated specifically in light of its short-term separation.

Maurizio Trevisan’s mother wrote to her youngest son—the only household member to migrate to Canada—in the days and weeks following his return to Montreal with his family in the summer months of 1963. Although her twenty-one year old son Maurizio, first migrated to Canada in 1949 Laura Adaggi had no intention to migrate to Canada since the remaining four of her children, her husband and their extended family all resided and worked in Italy, specifically in and around Venice. The situation changed

³⁹ Marie-Claire Grassi, “Des lettres qui parlent d’amour.” *Romantisme* 68.II (1990): 27.

in 1963, however, when Maurizio returned to Canada for a second time, after spending a year in Italy with his wife, Clara and their young daughters. The consequences of a second separation from her son, and this time, together with his family, proved extremely difficult emotionally for Maurizio's mother:

*Mio Maurizio, I have nothing else to say beyond what I told Clara. But to you, mio tesoro, I want to tell you how I have felt about mio Amore, this torment of mine has not at all been alleviated by the presence of our dear ones. There is no one who can fill this enormous void that surrounds me. Everyone thinks of their own things, their own lives, and I remain alone in my sorrow with my memories. At times, I tell myself that it was just meant to be. Ti prego, mio Maurizio (I beg you, my Maurizio), take care of your health and your peace of mind. I think of you, my dear, with all my love.*⁴⁰

Equally compelling is Daniela Perini's first letter to her daughter, Maddalena who travelled aboard an oceanliner to New York to finally reach her husband waiting for her in Montreal in November 1960. Maddalena, however, had been Daniela's helper, friend, and confidante, and her departure—not only from her household of birth as a result of marriage, but also and more poignantly, as a result of her migration to faraway Canada—proved to be emotionally difficult for her mother. Migration to Canada would not be an option for Daniela until much later because both her sons lived either with her or just a few hours away, and she felt they needed her. As a result, Maddalena's permanent migration to Canada was seen by her mother as analogous to death.

For Maddalena, the separation required her to reach out to her mother for strength and support via letters, while seeking comfort with her husband and his family in

⁴⁰ *"Mio Maurizio, Dopo ciò che dissi a Clara non avrei di notizie altro a dirti. Ma a Te mio Tesoro devo dirti tutta la piena (?) dei miei sentimenti del mio Amore perche questo strazio che provai non è per niente mitigato ne dalla presenza di nessuno dei nostri non c'è nessuno che possa colmare questo grande vuoto che mi circonda. Tutti pensano alle loro cose ai loro interessi io sola rimango nel mio dolore, nei miei ricordi. Ma mi propongo talvolta farmi una ragione così doveva avvenire. Ti prego Maurizio mio di badare alla tua salute e alla tua calma. Ti penso mio Moro con eseguibile amore."* Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, n.d. 1963. Letter no. 332.

Montreal. Despite Daniela's efforts to convince herself that Maddalena's departure was a good decision, their correspondence reveals some of the initial emotional effects of separation. She wrote: "*Carissima figlia*, I received your *cara lettera*, you have no idea how happy I was to hear your wonderful news. Since you left I have done nothing but cry and think of you."⁴¹ In light of Maddalena's permanent migration to Canada, and permanent absence from her mother's home, it is not surprising that the sorrows of rupture persisted for Maddalena's mother even six months after her departure. In April 1961, Daniela wrote to Maddalena: "For the moment, I have nothing else to say, as I stop writing to you, know that you are always in my heart, and that not one hour goes by every day that I don't think of you. I embrace you and kiss you affectionately with the Lord's Blessing. *Mamma*."⁴² Her emotional attachment to her daughter was frequently summarized in the letters by the phrase, "*Cara figlia, il mio pensiero* is always with you."⁴³

In contrast, Dante del Moro's departure from Arcugnano to Powell River was part of a household strategy that would require Dante's temporary separation until he could send money for his wife and children to join him. Living and working in Powell River with his cousins, while his wife and children in Arcugnano waited to join him was not easy for Dante del Moro. In nearly every letter to Sara, he included special words of affection to them—reassuring them of his constant love. To his children specifically, he

⁴¹ "*Carissima figlia, ho ricevuto la tua cara lettera, non sai quanta gioia ho provato nel sentire la bella che mi hai dato, poiché da quando sei partita non ho fatto altro che piangere e pensare a te.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, November 22, 1960. Letter no. 180.

⁴² "*Per il momento non ho altro da dirti, smetto di scrivere però ti ho sempre nel cuore e non passa un ora del giorno senza il mio pensiero sia rivolto a voi, ti abbraccio e Ti bacio affe.nte con la S. Benedizione. Mamma.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, April 18, 1961. Letter no. 207.

⁴³ "*Cara figlia il mio pensiero è sempre rivolto a te.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, February 27, 1961. Letter no. 203.

wrote: “*Cari Paolo e Elisabetta*, your *papà* sends you lots of *baci* and tells you that he can’t wait to eat with you all the candies he has put aside for you.”⁴⁴ Within four days of this letter, Dante wrote again to Paolo and Elisabetta. This time, he addressed each child individually. For instance to his five-year old son, Dante wrote about his difficulties in living without him, and to his younger daughter, he talked about chocolates and candies that he would be sharing with her soon. Both of these themes signalled Dante’s awareness that their separation from him was short term and that family reunification was imminent. At the same time, by writing these thoughts specifically to his young children, he made them aware that they would be with him soon:

Caro Paolo, my young man, Your *papà* thanks you for your affection, and tells you that he can no longer stand being away from you. He asks you to pray to Our Lady so She can make you come here soon to your *papà* who loves you so much. *Mia cara Nina*,⁴⁵ your *papà* is happy because he knows you are a good girl, and that you always go to the nursery school. If you learn many poems, when you come here, you’ll be saying them to me, and I will give you a bag of candies and chocolates that I’ve put away for you.⁴⁶

How did the children respond to their father’s emotional outreach? In her brother’s handwriting, we read one of Elisabetta’s responses: “I am your Nina and together with *mamma*, I send you lots of *baci e arrivederci presto, caro vecio*... (kisses and see you

⁴⁴ “*Cari Paolo e Elisabetta*, il vostro *papà* vi manda tanti *baci* e vi dice che vi aspetta per mangiare assieme tutte le caramelle che ha messo via.” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti and Paolo and Elisabetta del Moro, June 8, 1956. Letter no. 143.

⁴⁵ The word “Nina” here is affectionately used to mean “little girl” in general. This expression is commonly used in the northern regions of Italy.

⁴⁶ “*Caro Paolo*, mio piccolo ometto, Tuo *papà* Ti ringrazia del tuo affetto e ti dice che anche lui non può più stare senza di Tè e Ti dice di pregare sempre la Madonna che presto Ti faccia venire qui con il Tuo *papà* che tanto Ti vuol bene. *Mia cara Nina*, il tuo *Papà* è contento perché sa che sei una brava bambina e vai sempre all’asilo e se impari tante poesie, quando vieni qui le dici a me ed io allora ti dò il sacco di caramelle e cioccolata che ho messo via.” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti and Paolo and Elisabetta del Moro, June 12, 1956. Letter no. 144.

soon, my dear old man).”⁴⁷ In the same letter, Paolo added, knowing the importance that his First Communion was for his father: “*Caro papa*, I’m going to have my First Communion before we leave. Are you happy? Lots of *baci* from your Paolo.”⁴⁸ Paolo’s announcement that he would be doing his First Communion prior to leaving was important in light of their separation. First, it signalled again an anticipation of family reunification, as both events (his First Communion and the family’s departure) would take place within a short period of each other. Next, in this excerpt we also witness a child’s desire to please his father despite the distances between them. This observation illustrates Grassi’s point that, “le rapport parental est placé sous un double signe: plaire, satisfaire ses parents, rendre visibles aux yeux de tous les marques d’une éducation réussie et, par voie de conséquence, ‘méritier’ la tendresse parentale... .”⁴⁹

“*Figlia mia cara*, your letter and your wonderful news that I just received is a balm for my heart,”⁵⁰ wrote Daniela to her daughter shortly after Maddalena’s arrival in Montreal. Indeed, receiving good news from a migrant daughter helped appease a mother’s sorrow and melancholy in light of her daughter’s permanent departure. On the other hand, the emotional bond between mother and daughter was such that Maddalena interpreted her letter to mean that her mother was suffering because of her absence.

⁴⁷ “*Sono la tua Nina che assieme alla mamma ti manda tanti baci e arrivederci presto caro vecio mostaccion Nina.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti and Paolo and Elisabetta del Moro, August 9, 1956. Letter no. 100.

⁴⁸ “*Caro papa faccio la santa comunione prima di partire sei contento tanti baci dal tuo Paolo.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti and Paolo and Elisabetta del Moro, August 9, 1956. Letter no. 100.

⁴⁹ Grassi, “Des lettres qui parlent d’amour” 26.

⁵⁰ “*Figlia mia cara, Nel ricevere le tue lettere e leggere le belle notizie che mi dai sono un balsamo per il mio cuore.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, December 5, 1960. Letter no. 182.

Maddalena's response, in turn, galvanized Daniela to persuade her daughter that she was, in fact, doing well despite missing her terribly, and that she too should not suffer: "*Cara figlia*, don't feel sorry for me, I am never alone in the evenings. Sometimes I visit with *Signora* Palmetti, or I go to watch television at *Signora* Manna's. And, actually today I leave for Cisterna to attend Lisa's wedding."⁵¹

In temporary separation, the emotional dependency (especially, in the expression of sorrow and loneliness) was appeased by the knowledge that family reunification would occur at some point in the near future. Nonetheless, this dynamic also revealed traces of powerlessness experienced by kin members living apart. Indeed, in some respects even the urgency to respond to loved ones was itself a manifestation of powerlessness. We read an illustration of this in Dante's words to Sara regarding their daughter's diminished health:

Today I received your letter of the 6th of this month. I don't know how to tell you how much it hurts me to hear about Nina, I don't know if I should write or cry. I don't know what I can do besides think of you constantly. My goodness, there is no end to this torment! That we have to keep living like this, I don't know, I don't know who to turn to anymore, and sometimes, I think that the Divine Providence has forgotten us... *I cling to the hope* that when you will have received this letter, everything will be better.⁵²

⁵¹ "*Cara figlia, non prenderti pena per me, la sera non sono mai sola, qualche volta vado dalla Palmetti, oppure dalla Signora Manna a vedere la televisione. Proprio oggi parto per Cisterna per il matrimonio di Lisa.*" Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 30, 1961. Letter no. 206.

⁵² "*Oggi mi è giunta la Tua del 6 c.m. e proprio non sò come esprimere il mio dolore in merito a ciò che mi dici di Nina, non sò, se scrivere, o se piangere, non sò cosa posso fare all'infuori di Tenervi il mio pensiero continuo, su vai, impossibile che questo Tormento non finisca mai! Che si abbia da vivere sempre così, Io non sò, non sò più a chi rivolgermi, e alle volte mi viene di pensare che anche la divina provvidenza ci abbia dimenticati.... Spero ancora che per quando Ti arriverà questa mia tutto sia per il meglio.*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 13, 1956. Letter no. 149.

Imagination played an important role in helping loved ones overcome and negotiate separation. In this excerpt, we witness how Paolo desperately reached out to his father (through his mother's words) in anticipation of their eventual reunification: "Paolo instructs me to write to you and ask you to send some money for the train ticket he would like to buy so he can join you... ." ⁵³ The notion of imagining a mode of transportation that would take Paolo across the Atlantic to his father was reiterated in a subsequent letter as the date of departure for Paolo and his family drew near. This time, Paolo asked his father for money to be spent not on a train ticket, but for a bicycle:

he's still sleeping now, but he said that when I write to you, that I should ask for some money for a small bicycle, as he has learned how to ride it, and he wants to reach you by bicycle because... I told him that once he will know how to ride a bicycle, we will be leaving for Canada. So you can just imagine, all day he asks me, 'are we going?' ... ⁵⁴

Whether Paolo's request entailed money for a train ticket or a bicycle, both messages reveal that he very much wanted to see and be with his father again. Through his imagination and dreams of joining his father, Paolo was trying to cope with, and overcome the distance that separated them.

When family reunification was unlikely to occur, however, letter-writers often resorted to other *pensieri* to fuel their imaginations. In the following, a photograph sent by Maurizio to his mother acted as a catalyst for her mind to wander and imagine the life her son and his family were leading now that they were back in Canada:

⁵³ "Paolo mincarica di scriverti di mandargli i soldi perché deve comperarsi un treno per venire a raggiungerti..." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, April 27, 1956. Letter no. 92.

⁵⁴ "dorme ancora ma ha detto quando ti scrivo che ti domando i soldi per una bicicletta piccola perché ormai sa portarla e vuole raggiungerti in bicicletta... gli ho detto che quando sarà capace di andare in bicicletta allora verremo puoi immaginare tutto il giorno mi domanda allora andiamo..." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 20, 1956. Letter no. 76.

I'm replying to your letter and the photo you sent me a few days ago. Imagine my immense joy and emotion in seeing you both and looking so well... how much I think of you, and I am able to see you not only in the photo, but in my imagination as well. And, each day I feel that my little girls are well, and I imagine how much they are enjoying themselves... *Care Piccine!* (My dear little ones!) in Italy, they didn't have what they have now.⁵⁵

In cases in which adult children and parents were physically absent from the homes of loved ones in Italy, their presence was often experienced spiritually through their letters. Once again, the anticipation of family reunification helps us to discern differences between temporary and permanent separation. In temporary separation, the feeling of anticipating a reunion with family members is evident as a result of its realness and imminence. In cases of permanent separation, however, feelings of longing and hope are necessarily channelled in different directions. The following letters demonstrate my point more clearly. In the first case, Dante wrote to Elisabetta and Paolo in order to assert his presence and anticipate their imminent reunion:

*Mia cara Elisa, your papà knows that you have a terrible cough and prays for You. La mamma is going to help you get better. Always listen to la mamma, take the syrop, and say your prayers. You'll see that the Virgin Mary has never abandoned those who believe in her. She will make you better soon, and then you'll be coming to see papà who has all those candies waiting for you. You, Paolo, I can just imagine you, what are you up to? All kinds of things, right!... but listen, if you're a bad boy, and you don't listen to your mamma, I'll know about it, and then, you won't be coming to see me, and then you'll get nothing. Therefore, try to listen to your mamma, and always say your prayers.*⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "Rispondo alla tua lettera e fotografia ricevuta giorni fa' Immagina la mia gioia e commozione nel vedervi e così bene riusciti... Quanto vi penso e vi vedo non solo nella foto, ma nella mia immaginazione in ogni mia giornata sento che le mie bambine stano bene, e mi figuro come si divertono. Care Piccine! In Italia non avevano ciò che ora godono." Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, August 14, 1963. Letter no. 337.

⁵⁶ "Mia cara Elisa, il tuo Papà sa che hai la tosse brutta e prega per Te la mamma bella che ti aiuti, e ti faccia guarir presto, ascolta la mamma sempre, prendi il sciropo, e dici sempre le orazioni vedrai che la

Dante's words of encouragement and paternal love impelled both children to respond accordingly by referring also to the family's imminent reunion: "Elisa tells me to ask you, how many candies will she find when we arrive? Receive *baci* from Paolo who is by my side."⁵⁷ As the date of reunion drew near, Paolo and Elisabetta could not contain their excitement. Sara described their elation on board the S.S. Vulcania: "Elisabetta is all happy, as she sings and dances about because soon she'll be seeing her *papà*.... Paolo is smiling from ear to ear. Every day he asks me, 'how much time before we get there?' Elisabetta and Paolo send you their greetings, and lots of *bacioni* (big kisses)."⁵⁸

In permanent separation, however, other forms of negotiation often occurred before the resignation at being apart set in. The emotional solidarity expressed by correspondents on both sides of the ocean was one effort engaged in by kin, as we read Daniela's words to her daughter: "You tell me that you would pay anything to see me, and that you miss me tremendously. I leave it up to you to imagine what I would do to embrace you, Giuseppe and *la nipotina* (my grand-daughter)."⁵⁹

vergine santa non ha mai abbandonato chi a fede in lei, e ti farà guarire presto, e dopo verrai dal tuo papà a prendere tutte le caramelle che ti a messo via. Tè Paolo, mi sembra di vederti, quante ne fai? Di ogni sorta vero!... ma guarda che se sei cattivo, e non ascolti la mamma, io lo sò, e non vieni qui dal papà, e così non prendi niente, perciò guarda di ascoltare la mamma e dir sempre le orazioni." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti and Paolo and Elisabetta del Moro, July 2, 1956. Letter no. 137.

⁵⁷ "Elisa mi ha detto quante caramelle trova quando veniamo noi, ricevi baci da Paolo che è qui al mio fianco." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, April 16, 1956. Letter no. 79.

⁵⁸ "Elisabetta e tutta contenta canta e balla perche presto arriva dal suo papà." And, "è tutto contento ogni giorno mi domanda quanto manca all'arrivo. Ti salutano tanto e ti mandano tanti bacioni Elisabetta e Paolo." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, n.d. November 1956. Letter no. 111.

⁵⁹ "Tu mi dici chissà che cosa pagheresti e senti tanto la nostalgia di rivedermi, Ti lascio immaginare quello che farei io per riabbracciare Te, Giuseppe e la nipotina." Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, December 10, 1961. Letter no. 201.

Another form of negotiating permanent separation within the confines of the letter entailed the encouragement to write often, a request that was reiterated in all of the letter-series of this study. One case in point, however is illustrated in Marianna Domenica's words to her son, his wife, and his sister in 1960: "I send you all my best wishes and thank you for your *care* words that comforted me. Write to me often. I enjoy receiving *notizie*. *Baci cari...*." ⁶⁰

The desire to respond quickly to a dear one's letter was also a means to negotiate permanent separation, as we read Laura Adaggi's words to her son: "Maurizio, *mio Tesoro*, last night upon returning from the party, *Signora* Livi handed me your letter. Can you imagine my joy? It was like the sweetest final touches to my special day." ⁶¹ Laura rushed to reply to her son's letter in order to keep their epistolary dialogue fresh and alive. Her letter covers a wide range of emotions, from gratitude, pride and relief to excitement:

Mio amatissimo Maurizio (my most beloved Maurizio), I hope that this letter finds you in good health as I can assure you of ours. I have before me your last letter dated January 6. I am delighted to read that all is well... On the next day, I rushed to answer you. I also wanted to let you know that we received your cheque, for which, to this day I am extremely grateful to you. Yes, *mio* Maurizio, my big heart reveals itself always and in every way through the goodness of my *figlio*. ⁶²

⁶⁰ "vi mando i miei cari saluti e vi ringrazio tanto delle vostre care parole che o avuto un po di conforto da voi scrivetemi spesso che o piacere a avere notizie baci cari..." Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, n.d. 1960. Letter no. 33.

⁶¹ "Maurizio mio Tesoro, Ieri sera dal ritorno dalla festa, la Sig. Livi mi consegnò la tua lettera—immaginela la mia gioia? E stato come il dolce finimento alla mia festa." Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, October 6, 1963. Letter no. 333.

⁶² "Mio amatissimo Maurizio, Mi auguro che la presente vi trovi tutti in buona salute come posso assicurarvi di noi. Oh sotto gli occhi la tua ultima del 6 gennaio che tanto mi fece contenta nel leggere che nel complesso tutto procedeva bene... Io il giorno dopo subito mi affrettai risponderti anche in special modo per darti avviso d'aver ricevuto l'assegno che ancor oggi te ne sono immensamente grata. Sì mio Maurizio il mio grande Cuore si rivela in tutti i tempi ed in ogni solennità con la bontà di figlio." Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, February 2, 1966. Letter no. 339.

While letter-writers constructed emotional bridges in words in order to negotiate the gulf between loved ones and migrants, they also resorted to using other techniques such as including photographs or describing how they were leafing through a photo album to achieve a kind of virtual, physical contact with their families. As historian Martha Hanna suggests, “letter-writers knew in ways that historians have forgotten that the letter itself was a physical artefact that could cultivate intimacy by making the absent correspondent seem almost palpably present.”⁶³ Indeed, as Lystra also observes, “Though never an adequate substitute, correspondents experienced letter-writing as symbolically akin to personal presence.”⁶⁴

One letter that illustrates this mechanism was written by Daniela Perini to her daughter in Montreal upon receiving news of the birth of her grand-daughter: “you cannot imagine my joy in becoming a *nonna* already, I can’t wait for you to send me a photo so that I can meet my *nipotina* (my little grand-daughter).”⁶⁵ While a person-to-person meeting with her grand-daughter in Canada was not possible, this did not prevent Daniela from announcing and celebrating the news with her friends and family in Italy, as she told Maddalena: “as soon as I heard the wonderful news from Giuseppe, I invited all the friends of our building in honour of my little Isabella.”⁶⁶ Once Daniela received a picture of her new born grand-daughter, her enthusiasm and joy was boundless: “*Cara figlia*, I’ll

⁶³ Martha Hanna, “A Republic of Letters: the Epistolary Tradition in France during World War,” *American Historical Review* 108.5 (Dec. 2003): 1348.

⁶⁴ Lystra 25.

⁶⁵ “Non puoi immaginare la mia contentezza di essere già nonna, non vedo l’ora che mi mandi la foto per conoscere la mia nipotina...” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 8, 1961. Letter no. 208.

⁶⁶ “appena appresa la lieta notizia da Giuseppe, ho invitato tutti del palazzo in onore della piccolo Isabella.” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 8, 1961. Letter no. 208.

leave it up to you to imagine the joy I experienced in seeing my *cara nipotina*. I cried of joy and all day long, I stood there admiring her over and over again. I must tell you that she is indeed a beautiful girl. Whoever sees her is impressed with how healthy she looks besides being beautiful.”⁶⁷

In addition to the role played by photographs as markers of recent developments, the action of leafing through a photo album illicited a visual experience of a familial past. Daniela was familiar with this activity as she one day confided to Maddalena: “*il mio pensiero* is always with you and all of you, every so often when I miss you I open the photo album to look at your pictures and Giuseppe’s, and in that moment, I feel you are close to me.”⁶⁸

While the external devices of photographs and photo albums may seem like bridging devices in their own right, at the same time, they forced individuals to confront the realities of a loved one’s absence. For instance, once the photo album was closed, Daniela inevitably faced the emptiness of her home. Even four months later the pain of separation was hard to withstand as she wrote to Maddalena: “I’ll leave it up to you to imagine how much I would pay to see you again and be near you. But unfortunately, we need to be patient and we need to believe in God who one day will bring us together again. I cannot be near you now, but my heart and my *pensiero* is with you always.”⁶⁹ As

⁶⁷ “*Cara figlia, ti lascerò immaginare la gioia che ho provato nel vedere la mia cara nipotina, ho pianto di gioia e in tutta la giornata non ho fatto che rimirla, devo dirti che è una gran bella bambina. Chiunque la vede rimane meravigliato anche per come è grande oltre ad essere bella.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, September 30, 1961. Letter no. 206.

⁶⁸ “*il mio pensiero è sempre rivolto a te e a tutti voi, ogni qualvolta che sento la tua nostalgia apro l’Album per rivedere le tue foto e quelle di Giuseppe e in quel momento mi sembra che mi state vicino.*” Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, February 27, 1961. Letter no. 203.

⁶⁹ “*Ti lascio immaginare quello che pagherei io per poterti rivedere e starti vicino, ma purtroppo bisogna aver pazienza e avere fede in Dio che un giorno ci faccia riunire tutti insieme. Non ti posso stare vicino di*

a result, it seems to me that as sites of memory, photographs, photo albums, and even letters themselves possess a dialectical dimension in that they simulataneously help mitigate the absence of loved ones, and sustain the bonds of love and affection between kin while serving as reminders of the loss that was experienced through migration.

In other cases, this dialogic relationship was experienced by proxy, as when parents, for instance, were visited by their migrant child's friend, or a migrant was visited by someone from his or her home town. A letter from Marianna Domenica to her son Gianlorenzo illustrates my point. Immediately after being visited by Gianlorenzo's friend from Montreal, she wrote: "regarding the dollars that you sent us through the hands of your friend, *mi sembrava da vederti te* (it was like seeing you here). How much I would pay to see you again. But it's just not possible, the distance keeps us too far apart."⁷⁰

Particularly in the cases of individuals and families who stayed behind, the letters also show the importance of kinship and community in helping to cope with a loved one's absence. We observe this phenomenon in a letter written by Dante's brother-in-law in Arcugnano: "your children and Sara are well. Every night, Paolo as he returns home from the nursery, passes by to say 'hello'" ⁷¹ Other correspondents were less fortunate, however, and seemed to experience separation as a factor that further isolated them from their community. In the following letter written by Laura Adaggi to her son following his

persona ma il mio cuore e il mio pensiero è sempre rivolto a te." Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, June 17, 1961. Letter no. 202.

⁷⁰ "*dei dollari che ci ai mandato per le mani del tuo compagno mi sembrava da vederti te, quanto pagherei a vederti ma non giova, la lontananza ci divide troppo.*" Letter from Marianna Domenica to Gianlorenzo Colonello, August 8, 1956. Letter no. 27.

⁷¹ "*I tuoi bambini e la Sara stanno bene e Paolo alla sera di ritorno dall'asilo viene a salutarci...*" Letter from Luca Branchetti to Dante del Moro, July 25, 1956. Letter no. 132.

return to Canada, we observe how, in light of these circumstances, kinship support was simply not available:

But to you, *mio Tesoro*, I must tell you all I feel about my Love, because this torment that I experienced was in no way mitigated by the presence of any of our dear ones. There is no one who can fill this enormous emptiness that surrounds me. Everyone thinks of their own things, their own interests, and I remain alone in my sorrow with my memories.⁷²

While loneliness and nostalgia were realities for all migrants and loved ones, the intensity of these emotions was expressed more deeply in the cases of permanent separation. It's clear that loneliness and nostalgia for a significant other was experienced daily, and perhaps even exacerbated during holidays and special occasions as is revealed in a letter that Daniela Perini wrote to her daughter: "*Carissima figlia*, I am delighted to receive your news, and immediately I am writing to give you news about us... Our Christmas was fine. We had a nice time, but I can't say the same for New Year's Day because I missed you terribly."⁷³ The letters of Laura Adaggi reveal a similar scenario. In the aftermath of her 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration, Laura wrote to her son: "Briefly Maurizio, it was a gorgeous day. Even Marta looked her best. Only you were missing, *mio* Maurizio, and your family. At the table I talked about you all. The party was

⁷² "Ma a Te mio Tesoro devo dirti tutta la piena? dei miei sentimenti del mio Amore perche questo strazio che provai non è per niente mitigato ne dalla presenza di nessuno dei nostri non ce nessuno che possa colmare questo grande vuoto che mi circonda Tutti pensano alle loro cose ai loro interessi io sola rimango nel mio dolore, nei miei ricordi." Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, n.d. estimated July-August 1963. Letter no. 332.

⁷³ "*Carissima figlia*, nel ricevere con gioia la tua lettera, mi accingo subito a darti mie notizie... Il Natale anche noi lo abbiamo passato bene, non Ti posso dire altrettanto il Capodanno poiché ho sentito tanta la tua mancanza." Letter from Daniela Perini to Maddalena Franchi, January 10, 1961. Letter no. 205.

beautiful, but my heart was not happy thinking of you, *mio amore infinito* (my infinite love)!”⁷⁴

B) Emotional Energies in Love Letters of Migration

In contrast to letters between parents and children, another form of emotional contact that characterized the transatlantic experience was the correspondence between lovers. To begin with, what is a letter of love, or rather, a love letter? According to Roland Barthes, a love letter is, “La figure [qui] vise la dialectique particulière de la lettre d’amour, à la fois vide (codée) et expressive (chargée de l’envie de signifier le désir).”⁷⁵ Mireille Bossis, in a scholarly debate on the contours of a love letter, offers the following definition: “Expression par excellence du sentiment, elle ouvre à la fois sur le domaine de l’éternel et de la répétition, du fugace et de l’inattendu, mais aussi de la vie quotidienne avec ses codes et ses banalités.”⁷⁶ While definitions of the love letter abound in literary

⁷⁴ “*Insomma Maurizio una bellissima giornata anche Marta stava proprio bene. Solo tu mio Maurizio mancavi con la tua famiglia a tavola parlo di voi tutti, ma fu bella mia festa, il cuore mio non era felice pensando a Te mio amore infinito!*” Letter from Laura Adaggi to Maurizio Trevisan, October 6, 1963. Letter no. 333.

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977) 187.

⁷⁶ Mireille Bossis, “Table Ronde: la lettre d’amour,” *L’epistolarité à Travers les Siècles. Geste de communication et/ou d’écriture*, ed. Mireille Bossis (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990) 39. Indeed, as one of the participants in the round table discussion suggests, “la lettre d’amour—même si, come il se doit, elle ne parle que d’amour—ne dit pas l’amour mais l’accompagne, le deviance, le réclame, le commente, le regrette. Genre impur, la lettre d’amour mêle à l’analyse et à l’observation des sentiments, des narrations, des descriptions, des fragments d’autoportrait, une ornementation qui constituent autant de projections de la personnalité. En s’adressant à l’autre, l’individu cherche à établir avec lui une communication qui le fasse sortir de sa solitude subjective. Le sentiment amoureux est le ressort qui fait écrire la lettre, mais le contenu de celle-ci nous intéresse en réalité surtout pour d’autres raisons que ce sentiment lui-même, vite identifié... on en sait plus sur une vie, sur un tempérament, sur une culture, sur un style.” Bernard Bray, “Treize Propos sur la Lettre d’Amour,” *L’Epistolarité à Travers les Siècles: Geste de communication et/ou d’écriture*, eds. Mireille Bossis (and Charles Porter) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990) 40-41

works and epistolary studies written over the centuries, the correlations of the love letter with migration have not been explored.

First, it may be useful to examine some of the parameters that constitute a love letter. Is it the specific content of love exchanged between lovers, or betrothed couples? Or does it include the emotional outreach in the letters between married couples? The literature on “romance epistolary”, as Janet Altman calls it, or the “lettre d’amour” as opposed to the wider meaning of “écritures intimes” suggests that love letters are the exclusive written expression of unmarried couples at the early stages of their courtship. But what of the married couples who wrote of love and other things in their letters as they reached out across the distances that separated them? Are their letters not love letters, or letters of love, as well? As Karen Lystra suggests, the intimate communication of lovers (including letter-writing) was enacted by both single individuals and *married* couples.⁷⁷

Perhaps at this point it is useful to identify what I mean by love in this context. In this study, love implies romantic love in a heterosexual relationship. But how do we define romantic love--the emotion, *par excellence*, that has been the subject of countless novels, stories, verse, proverbs, songs, and other forms of creative works, as well as individual reflection since the beginnings of civilisations? Anthropologist William Jankowiak offers one definition as he equates romantic love with romantic passion: “any intense attraction involving the idealization of the other within an erotic context. The idealization carries with it the desire for intimacy and the pleasurable expectation of enduring for some unknown time into the future.”⁷⁸ In his research on love and lust in

⁷⁷Lystra 17.

⁷⁸ William Jankowiak, “Introduction,” *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, ed. William Jankowiak (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 4.

Nigeria, Leonard Plotnicov also suggests that romantic love is “the ardent, fervent, and passionate desire for another without whom the lover experiences the feeling of being acutely incomplete, as if a vital part of her or him was lacking.”⁷⁹ In light of these recent efforts within anthropology to define romantic love, I argue that whether letters were written by a married couple, a betrothed couple or a couple in courtship, if the context and content of these letters resonated in a striking way the emotion of romantic love—as defined by Jankowiak and Plotnicov—then they are by definition letters of love. In all of these cases I examine, the couples engaged in correspondence shared one primary experience: that of having been forced apart as a result of migration.

From his first days on the S.S. *Saturnia* to the moment of family reunion at the port of Powell River, nine long months of separation passed in the relationship between Dante del Moro, his wife Sara, and their children. Their intense correspondence of love and longing captures the emotional highs and lows of migration experienced by a married couple. The second set of letters was exchanged between Clara Montorio in Montreal, and her beloved Maurizio Trevisan in Venice. In 1948, three years after Clara and Maurizio began courting, Clara and her mother left Italy to join her father in Montreal. Prior to her departure, she and Maurizio had only written to each other between Venice and Cortina d’Ampezzo to arrange meetings. As a result of Canada’s Sponsorship Program, Maurizio joined Clara in Montreal in 1949, and soon after they were married. Their correspondence of nine months--from October 1948 to June 1949--illustrates the emotional woes and joys of a betrothed couple.

⁷⁹ Leonard Plotnicov, “Love, Lust and Found in Nigeria,” *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, ed. William Jankowiak (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 129.

The third set of letters contains only one side of the correspondence between Giordano Rossini who lived in Ostia and worked in Rome, and Ester di Leonardi, the woman he loved who had just emigrated to Montreal with her sister and brothers to join their uncle and brother. Beginning in 1957 Giordano wrote frequently to Ester and his letters offer a unique window into the psychological and emotional universes of a young man desperately in love.⁸⁰

The power or affectiveness of the love letter rests, in part, in the nature of the document itself, which allows both for a first reading and subsequent rereadings to discern underlying meanings.⁸¹ Indeed, as anthropologists Jan Collins and Thomas Gregor suggest, things that go across personal boundaries like intimate and revealing words take on deep emotional significance.⁸² As scholars of epistolary studies agree, the process of letter-writing in love correspondence hinges in part on dynamics that are specific to the process itself, i.e. waiting, receiving, reading, rereading, writing and sending of a letter,⁸³ as well as on the specificity of the context, content and relational dynamics of the correspondents. In the following section, I bring to light some of the

⁸⁰ The archived correspondence dates from the first letter Giordano Rossini wrote to Ester di Leonardi once she left for Canada, that is from March 10, 1957 and continues until August 18, 1960 with an interruption between the years.

⁸¹ Much as emotions are socially constructed, the notion of “romantic love” is also, I believe, dependent on its social and historical context. My understanding of the social and historical construction of romantic love is drawn from Laura Ahearn’s suggestion that, “there is no universal, ahistorical experience of romantic love that all humans share.” Ahearn 48. Also, my concern here is not to investigate whether the discourse of romantic love in the letters is true, or not. As Nicole Constable suggests, “It would be impossible to ‘prove’ whether love is present in these relationships... There is no question, however, that a discourse about romantic love is often present among couples involved in correspondence relationships.” Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage* 128.

⁸² Jan Clanton Collins and Thomas Gregor, “Boundaries of Love,” *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, ed. William Jankowiak (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 73.

⁸³ See in particular: Altman (1982), Albertine (1992), Lystra (1989), Dauphin (1991, 1995), Bossis (1990, 1994), Grassi (1986, 1990), Lyons (1999), Chartier (1991, 1995); Willis (2006); and Gerber (2000, 2006).

emotional traits and dynamics that were both implicitly and explicitly expressed in the three letter-series, and I compare the different nuances in emotional outreach to their specific “stories”.

In her observations on the *lettre intime*, Marie-Claire Grassi notes that, “le corps devient présent et l’écriture se place non seulement sous le signe du moi mais aussi de l’excès, de l’expression de la démesure, de l’incessante hyperbole qui transforme je t’aime en je t’adore et joue éperdument avec les mille, mille fois, un million de baisers et de choses tendres.”⁸⁴ The metamorphosis of affective expression in letters of love transpires not only in *lettres intimes* in general, but also, as we witness below, in the context of separation between two people in love as in the case of migration.

Through the following, we observe how the intensity of the expression of love—moving from less to more—is more subtle in the correspondence between a married couple like, Dante and Sara, than in the letters Maurizio and Clara, or Giordano and Ester, who were not married. Here are some examples that show what I mean. Dante wrote to Sara on June 22, 1956:

You see *mia cara*, every day I live with the hope of seeing news from you. It doesn’t matter what kind of news, and today, more than any other day, as soon as I woke up, I went to the post office (two steps away from here) always with this desire nestled in my heart that is with me always. But nothing. All I found was a grand delusion, and so I started to write to you, with my thoughts pouring out to you, so that I could quell this angst...⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Grassi, “Des lettres qui parlent d’amour” 23.

⁸⁵ “Vedi mia cara, tutti i giorni sto con la speranza di vedere tue nuove, non importa di che sorte sono, e oggi più di tutto, appena alzato sono andato alla posta (che è qui a due passi) sempre con questo desiderio nel cuore che non mi lascia mai, ma niente ho trovato delusione grande e basta, così mi sono messo a scrivere, con il pensiero rivolto a voi giusto per calmare questa ansia continua che mi rode dentro, perdonami di questo egoismo, di questa mia esigenza, perché penso solo a questo...” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, June 22, 1956. Letter no. 150.

Within less than two months, Dante wrote again:

What can I tell you... with every passing day, I feel more and more lonely and the feeling of missing you all is stronger and stronger, as is my wish to have you here with me.... So we can talk about us, our daily problems, have someone with whom I can confide in freely; someone I can open my heart to; even though I find myself with *cari* friends, you know very well that one can say everything to them only up to a certain point. And the rest we have to keep to ourselves.... I close this letter and after sending you many *saluti*. I want to tell you that *ti amo tanto* (I love you so much) and that my heart continues to be with you and our children. Everything else (beyond health) is worthless.⁸⁶

In contrast, Clara's letter to Maurizio written just a few weeks after her departure signalled stronger emotions and more visible affection:

I think you think of me as much as I think of you, that you love me as much as I love you, and so, this is enough to put my heart at peace and to set aside my worries. I'm not sure why in the past few days I didn't write to you... I'm still working and it's going well..., many times the Italian girl who sits with me tells me that I must be truly in love, do you know why? It's easy to guess, because I only speak of you... I remember every song, every detail, and while I am forced to face my reality, my gaze and my thoughts are absent... what can I do but remember the past? And I only know when I can do it. I'd like to sleep and dream forever, and only awaken to you next to me... sadly, I need to wait and open my eyes to reality, and accept whatever *il destino* (fate) sends our way, hoping that it will bring us well-deserved happiness. I only dream to see you again soon because, believe me, I miss you terribly.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "cosa vuoi, ogni giorno che passa e piu solo mi sento, sempre piu forte sento la vostra mancanza e la nostalgia di avervi qui vicini, per poter parlare di noi, dei nostri problemi quotidiani, avere con chi confidarmi liberamente con il cuore, perche nonostante mi trovi in mezzo ed amici cari, sai bene che si puo confidarsi si, ma fino ad un certo punto, ed il resto bisogna tenerselo per conto proprio... Termino e dopo di mandarti tanti saluti, ti voglio dire che ti amo tanto e di continuo il mio cuore è con te e con le nostre creature. Tutto il resto (dopo la salute) non vale niente." Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 5, 1956. Letter no. 166.

⁸⁷ "credo che tu mi pensi quanto io ti penso, che tu mi ami quanto io ti amo ed allora mi basta ciò per mettermi il cuore in pace e per lasciar da parte la preoccupazione. Non so perché questi giorni non ti ho scritto... Continuo il lavoro e va abbastanza bene... tante volte la ragazza italiana che è con me mi dice che devo essere tremendamente innamorata, sai perché? E facile indovinare, perché non parlo che di te..., mi ricordo, ogni canzone, ogni cosa e spesso mi chiama alla realtà mentre il mio sguardo e il mio pensiero sono assenti... che cosa dovrei fare io se non ricordare il passato? E solo io so quando posso rievocarlo ed allora sempre vorrei sognare, vorrei potermi addormentare e risvegliarmi solo quando tu fossi vicino a

Finally, the letters of the courting couple, Giordano and Ester convey the strongest intensity of affective expression, likely because a break down in their relationship had the highest probability of the three collections. Here Giordano wrote to Ester within a few days following her departure:

Mio caro amore, here I am again. Writing to you for me is a great consolation. Did you receive the letter and postcard that I sent you in Lisbon? I hope so, how are you all? Did you have a good trip? Did you start thinking of your return trip? *Amore mio*, you must come back—so much so, that the other day, I threw a coin for you in the *Fontana di Trevi*. As you can see, I'm always thinking of you. Tell me what you've seen. What you've been doing. Are you enjoying yourself? Write to me, tell me everything. I feel so lonely. I miss you terribly. I cannot live without you, *non mi lasciare!!!* (don't leave me!!!)⁸⁸

In her study of young Nepali couples' pursuit of romantic love through correspondence, Ahearn suggests that love is perceived as something that, "afflicts and torments them... makes them feel like they're going crazy."⁸⁹ At the same time, Ahearn notes, "love also empowers them, giving them a sense of agency in other realms of their lives."⁹⁰ Lystra discusses "emotional power" in romantic love in nineteenth-century America, and shows how "the dynamics of romantic love created interpersonal power

me... purtroppo devo aspettare ed aprire gli occhi alla realtà, prendere con rassegnazione tutto ciò che il destino ci ha riservato, sempre sperando che questo sia benigno con noi e che possa darci quella felicità che crediamo ben meritate. L'unico mio sogno è di vederti presto perché credimi mi manchi tanto." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, January 15, 1949. Letter no. 311.

⁸⁸ "*Mio caro amore, eccomi di nuovo a te, poter scriverti è per me una grande consolazione. hai ricevuto la lettera e la cartolina che ti ho mandato a Lisbona? spero di sì, come state? avete fatto buon viaggio? hai cominciato a pensare al viaggio di ritorno? Amore mio tu devi tornare--tanto più che l'altro giorno ho gettato per te un soldo nella fontana di Trevi, come vedi penso sempre a te, raccontami quello che hai visto, quello che hai fatto, ti sei divertita? scrivimi, raccontami tutto, mi sento tanto solo, tu mi manchi tanto, non posso vivere senza di te, non mi lasciare!!!*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

⁸⁹ Ahearn 48-49.

⁹⁰ Ahearn 48-49.

through the pleasures and satisfactions as well as the vulnerability of a shared identity.”⁹¹
As she observes, “while romantic love was unstable in the sense of its duration or staying power, it had compelling effects on individual lives.”⁹²

One of the compelling effects of romantic love was self-empowerment. The love correspondence of the three couples reveals romantic love as a form of empowerment for the writers. We witness this effect on Giordano as he describes his sense of inspiration and optimism after receiving confirmation of Ester’s love:

Amore mio, you have no idea how much joy you have given me when you wrote to me from Gibraltar... I was eagerly waiting for your letter. Any news that would prove to me that you’ve been thinking of me... I hope *il destino* is on our side now unlike in the past. And so, have faith and don’t be impatient, for my love for you will never change... I know very well that you love me too... .⁹³

Consider also Dante’s words of joy upon receiving good news from Sara: “I can’t begin to tell you how happy I am to hear that Elisabetta is feeling better. All I can say is that I feel like a new man.”⁹⁴

Fading is another characteristic of romantic love that is encountered in the letters. As Roland Barthes suggests, fading is “Epreuve douloureuse selon laquelle l’être aimé semble se retirer de tout contact, sans même que cette indifférence énigmatique soit dirigée contre le sujet amoureux ou prononcée au profit de qui ce soit d’autre, monde ou

⁹¹ Lystra 51-52.

⁹² Lystra 55.

⁹³ “*Amore mio non sai quanta gioia mi hai dato scrivendomi da Gibraltar..., aspettavo con ansia una tua lettera, una tua notizia o qualcosa di te che testimoni il tuo pensiero verso di me...ma non spero che il destino sia ancora più avverso con noi come è già stato, perciò abbi fede e non essere impaziente poiché il mio amore per te non cambierà mai...sò benissimo che pure tu mi vuoi molto bene...*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 18, 1957. Letter no. 404.

⁹⁴ “*Non posso esprimere la mia contentezza nel sentire che Elisabetta va meglio ti dico solo che mi sembra di essere un altro.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 10, 1956. Letter no. 151.

rival.”⁹⁵ It is perhaps, no coincidence then, that this emotion—in conjunction with empowerment and the feeling of going crazy—are identified in the love letters of these three couples. Because the expression and feelings of love appear both in single letters and sequentially in correspondence, love in transnational relationships of migration was a kind of dialectic that illicit feelings both of elation and misery.

In *Invitations to Love*, Ahearn also observes that the active force of love in young Nepali women and men is associated “with being ‘developed’ and successful.”⁹⁶ In the analysis, agency through love was associated with becoming “successful” economically—as in the case of Giordano who wrote to Ester that now all he had to do was *sistemarsi* (settle down economically) so that she could return, marry him and be happy for the rest of her life: “I can’t give up—I must face up to life, and fight it, fight it for my ideal, overcome the obstacles that stand in my path or rather, our path... .”⁹⁷ In other letters, similar messages were invoked with words like: “You’ll see that as soon as my finances are settled, I’ll make you come back and we can get married immediately..., ”⁹⁸ and “I’d like to work even 15 hours per day, so that I can get a good job and marry you as soon as possible,”⁹⁹ and finally, “when are you coming back? What a silly

⁹⁵ Barthes 129.

⁹⁶ Ahearn 152.

⁹⁷ “*non debbo abattermi—devo affrontare la vita, combatterla, combattere per un ideale, vincere gli ostacoli che sbarrano il mio cammino o meglio il nostro... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 10, 1957. Letter no. 400.

⁹⁸ “*Vedrai non appena avrò una sistemazione ti farò ritornare e ci sposeremo subito... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 21, 1957. Letter no. 407.

⁹⁹ “*vorrei lavorare anche 15 ore al giorno, perché’ mi possa fare una posizione e sposarti al più presto possibile.*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 26, 1957. Letter no. 410.

question, since your return depends on me. The earlier I establish myself economically, the earlier you'll come back. Isn't it so?"¹⁰⁰

"Success" was also expressed when one of the parties fulfilled the necessary Canadian migration procedures that would hasten their reunion in Canada. Here the power of love provided both parties with the strength to overcome difficulties and surmount obstacles, including space, between them. Despite their physical absence, migrants and loved ones drew from this love and transformed it into agency on their part. For instance, upon returning from the Canadian embassy in Rome, in which Sara was issued a visa granting her emigration to Canada, Sara described to Dante her relief in passing the interview enabling her to join her husband soon in Canada:

There are three of them who sign the visa. This one was more picky than the others. He wanted to know (*morte e miracoli*) every single detail. I answered all of his questions. Nonetheless, I was scared out of my wits. Altogether, even this one went well. I can't tell you what a sigh of relief I breathed, *caro*, it wasn't as easy as at Castelfranco. There were a lot of people, and think that from eight-thirty in the morning to noon, if Luca had not been with me to give me a hand, I don't know how I would have handled it, with the children who don't listen to reason.¹⁰¹

On April 7, 1956, Dante visited a notary in Powell River to try and expedite the migration procedures for his wife and children. He wrote: "I spoke with the notary here in Powell River, and basically, he said that I don't need to send you anything... all you have

¹⁰⁰ "quando torni? che stupida domanda che ti faccio, poiché il tuo ritorno dipende da me, prima mi sistemo e prima ritorni, non è così?" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 4, 1957. Letter no. 355.

¹⁰¹ "ce ne sono tre che firmano il visto questo era più pignolo ha voluto sapere (*morte e miracoli*) di tutto, io indifferentemente gli rispondevo, avevo una fifa ma insomma è andata bene anche questa. Ti dico che ho messo un sospiro di sollievo caro, non è stato tanto facile come a Castelfranco, c'era pure tanta gente pensa dalle otto fino a mezzo giorno se non avevo Luca non so proprio come me la sbrigavo(?), con i bambini e non intendono ragioni." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 27, 1956. Letter no. 84.

to do is go to the travel agency and they will proceed with the paperwork using the same file number as mine... This means that the complete file is valid, including the visit made then... .”¹⁰² In a later letter, Dante wrote, “I intend to follow through like this for the only reason that the less money I send you, the faster I can put up house and have everything you need from top to bottom, and I wish (always with the good Lord’s help) that upon your arrival, none of the necessities will be missing, except the linens.”¹⁰³

Another illustration that shows the interconnections between love, inspiration and migration procedures is Clara’s letter to Maurizio written on May 8, 1949:

Tonight, I just couldn’t resist. For better or for worse I wanted to write to you so that I could also send you these papers that you’ll find included here, I don’t know if you’ve started the procedure, but I hope to know something about this tomorrow (I tell you honestly that if it wouldn’t be the case, my disappointment would be immense) in any case together with the papers you’ll be bringing to Rome, I would include even this one, but before going there for the interview, you’ll need to be in possession of your ticket for boarding a ship. I’ll be sending it to you as soon as I hear something from you advising me the stage you are at with the procedures.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² “*ho parlato con il notaio di qui, e in poche parole mi ha detto che non occorre che io ti mandi niente... basta che tu vada all'agenzia viaggi e loro con il medesimo numero della pratica che hanno fatto per me...fanno anche per te, vale a dire che e valida tutta la pratica, compresa la visita fatta allora.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 4, 1956. Letter no. 158.

¹⁰³ “*intendo far così per il solo scopo che meno soldi mando via del mio guadagno qui, e più presto sto a mettere via del mio guadagno qui, e più presto sto a mettere su il necessario per la casa, o meglio per voi, e sai bene che bisogna provvedere da capo a piedi, ed io desidero (sempre con l'aiuto del buon Dio) che al vostro arrivo qui, non manchi niente del necessario all'infuori della biancheria.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 15, 1956. Letter no. 168.

¹⁰⁴ “*questa sera proprio non ho potuto resistere, o bene o male ho voluto comporre questa mia anche per mandarti questo incartamento che troverai accluso qui, non so se hai incominciato le pratiche spero di sapere senz'altro domani (ti dico francamente che se non fosse proverei una grande delusione) ad ogni modo assieme agli incartamenti che porterai a Roma accluderei anche questo però prima di recarti in tal città per le visite dovrai essere in possesso pure del biglietto d'imbarco e quello te lo spedirò non appena saprò qualche cosa da te cioè dove mi avverti a che punto sei con le pratiche.*” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, May 8, 1949. Letter no. 316.

“*Ero fuori di me,*” (“I thought I was going crazy”)¹⁰⁵ wrote Sara to Dante, when she had not heard from him in days. And Dante, who wrote to Sara, that all he did was work and think of her and their children: “When you write, ... think that your husband, when he returns from work, the first thing he does is check if there’s any mail for him, and only upon seeing your handwriting does his fatigue pass... .”¹⁰⁶ When compared with the other letter-series, the expressions of “fading” in the letters between husband and wife appear more subtle. However, they also illustrate profound sadness as Sara’s words to Dante show: “and so the days pass, and our existence diminishes.”¹⁰⁷

In the love letters between Maurizio and Clara and Giordano and Ester, jumbles of feelings often surfaced in the same letter. For instance, on November 6, 1948, Clara wrote to Maurizio:

Mio amore. There is no place for me to find peace. You can imagine why, can’t you? Not even today did I receive news from you. I am devastated and disheartened in a way that I cannot describe. Why, tell me, why do you do this? Do I deserve this kind of punishment? Maurizio, I beg you. Please, as soon as you receive this letter, let me know something, so that I can put my heart at peace. Oh! What a life. How tired I am to think of one possibility over another. I can’t take it anymore... and I ask myself if happiness actually exists in this world. Maybe it does, but it lasts for such a short time that we can barely notice it, and to find it, how much we need to fight for it and sacrifice. You see, tonight I am anything but optimistic, believe me it feels like everything is against me, and there’s no other reason for this but your silence... you know that I suffer enough from your being so far away, why then add these moments of trouble to me? I admit that your

¹⁰⁵ “*Ero fuori di me.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro. June 18, 1956. Letter no. 145.

¹⁰⁶ “*Quando scrivi,... pensa che tuo marito quando torna dal lavoro la prima cosa che fa guarda se c’è niente per lui, e solo al vedere la tua calligrafia, le passa la stanchezza...*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, June 12, 1956. Letter no. 144.

¹⁰⁷ “*e così passano i giorni e diminuisce la nostra esistenza.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, June 13, 1956. Letter no. 107.

silence might be due to a postal delay, but to me this reason is only remotely possible. Nothing but horrid thoughts enter my mind.¹⁰⁸

Just ten days after seeing Ester for the last time, Giordano wrote to her, “today was a dark day for me, I had the devil in my hair, I don’t even know the reason for my anxiety. All I know is that my nerves are broken. If I continue like this, sooner or later, I’ll be deep in a depression. I can’t take it any longer. Since you left, I don’t talk to any one, I’ve closed myself off.”¹⁰⁹ In a following letter, Giordano confided to Ester what the Easter holiday meant to him, “In two days it’s Easter and everyone will be celebrating with joy and merriment, perhaps I will be the only person for whom Easter brings no joy, no diversion. I’ve become strange. I don’t how to explain it, even in the wake of a surprise, I am indifferent. For me there are no holidays, every day is the same, monotonous and dull.”¹¹⁰ Over one month later, he wrote: “I am so confused in my head, sometimes I’m afraid I’m going crazy... .”¹¹¹ And later, he wrote:

¹⁰⁸ “Mio amore, Non ho pace, non trovo pace in nessun posto, tu sai immaginare perché, neppure oggi ho ricevuto da te, sono desolata e avvilita in maniera indescrivibile, perché, dimmi perché fai così? Mi merito forse un castigo simile? Maurizio mio ti prego appena ricevi questa mia fammi sapere qualche cosa affinché possa mettermi un pò il cuore in pace--Oh! che vita, come sono stanca di pensare per una cosa o per l'altra, non ne posso più... mi chiedo se la felicità è di questo mondo, forse sì, ma dura così poco che quasi non ce se ne accorge e per raggiungerla quanto si deve lottare e sacrificare, vedi questa sera sono tutt'altro che ottimista, ma credi, mi sembra che tutto sia contro di me e non c'è altro che un motivo, il tuo silenzio, il tuo prolungato silenzio... lo sai che soffro abbastanza per la tua lontananza perché aggiungermi anche questo momento? Ammetto che può essere anche ritardo di posta, ma ora io non penso che lontanamente a questo, a me non passano per la mente che pensieri brutti.” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 6, 1948. Letter no. 320.

¹⁰⁹ “oggi è stata una giornata nera per me, avevo un diavolo per capello, il motivo di questo mio nervosismo non lo so nemmeno io, so solo che sono giù coi nervi, se continuo così prima o poi mi prenderà un forte esaurimento, non ne posso più; da quando sei partita non mi confido più con nessuno, mi sono chiuso in me stesso.” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 20, 1957. Letter no. 406.

¹¹⁰ “Tra due giorni è Pasqua, tutti la festeggiano con gioia e allegria forse io sarò l'unica persona alla quale Pasqua mi apporterà nessuna gioia, e nessun svago, sono diventato strano, non saprei spiegarlo, anche di fronte ad una sorpresa rimango indifferente, per me non esistono più feste, tutti giorni passano uguali, monotoni, insipidi.” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 18, 1957. Letter no. 359.

¹¹¹ “ho una grande confusione nella testa, alle volte ho paura di diventare pazzo... .” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 6, 1957. Letter no. 357.

Mia adorata, even this holiday has passed like all the others. I did nothing special. It's very strange! At every holiday, I feel so alone. I'd like to go somewhere far far away where I can be alone and see no one, I am bothered by these masses of people who laugh and joke. I'm almost envious of those young men who take walks with their girlfriends. I'd like to do that too, but *il destino* won't let me!! I am destined to remain away from you, and this makes me almost angry; I'd like to see no one. In the meantime, no one understands me. They don't know what's going on inside of me. Maybe you too cannot understand me. I feel terribly alone, abandoned. I thought I had found the person with whom I could confide myself, find solace. Instead, here! *Il destino* has taken her from me to far away Canada...¹¹²

In her discussion on romantic love in Victorian America, Karen Lystra observes:

the emotional highs and lows of romantic love contributed to an intensified concentration on the individual's interior life and added further impetus to the development of a personal identity separate from social obligations and public roles... Both sexes experienced a wide range of feelings and an intensity of emotion during romantic love which not only strengthened individual self-consciousness but also helped bridge gender divisions. After marriage, the emotional response patterns of romantic love were less intense or at least the range of emotional expression in letters was narrower. As long as romantic love survived, however, its characteristic response patterns might be activated within as well as outside a marital relationship.¹¹³

Indeed, throughout the three letter-series, the tone of urgency and desperation also ranges in intensity. While a measure of emotional fluidity is sustained in the letters between the married couple, Dante and Sara, it is striking in the letters of the betrothed couple, Clara and Maurizio, and even more so, in the letters of the courting couple,

¹¹² “*Mia adorata, anche questa giornata festiva e' passata come tutte le alter, non ho fatto niente di speciale è molto strano! Tutte le feste mi sento tanto solo, vorrei andare in un posto lontano lontano dove posso stare solo e non vedere nessuno, mi dà tanto fastidio quella massa di gente che ridono, scherzano, sono quasi invidioso di vedere quei giovani che vanno a spasso con le loro fidanzate; vorrei farlo anch'io, ma a me questo non è concesso dal destino!! Sono destinato a starti lontano e questo mi fa diventare quasi cattivo; vorrei non vedere più nessuno, intanto la gente non mi comprende, non sanno quello che sento dentro di me, forse nemmeno tu riesci a capirmi, mi sento solo, abbandonato, credevo di aver trovato la persona con cui confidarmi, consolarmi, invece ecco! che il destino me la porta via nel lontano Canada.*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 30, 1957. Letter no. 383.

¹¹³ Lystra 47.

Giordano and Ester. Here, we can observe in two of countless letters, the emotional range that fluctuated from ecstasy, happiness, resignation to jealousy, longing, pain, fear, desolation, nostalgia, irony, and sarcasm, and back to optimism.

In the following letter, we witness how the emotions expressed by Clara moved from happiness at receiving news from Maurizio to further uncertainties and desolation as she sought to understand her suffering as a result of his silence. On May 8, 1949, Clara wrote to Maurizio:

Mio amato Maurizio, if I have delayed a little in sending you news, it's only because I was waiting for a reply from those two letters I had sent you some time ago. I waited all of this week in angst that I leave up to you to imagine, I would call my *mamma* every day at my break to find out if I had news, but the answer was always negative. Yes, I received the letter you sent me from Ampezzo (to be noted) with a 15-day delay from the other letter, and then nothing. What happened? You tell me what I should be thinking. Or maybe you want me to go crazy? Oh Maurizio, you shouldn't do this to me. If you bear a grudge against me for that letter that I wrote to you in a moment of disgust and disappointment, you're wrong, very wrong! You know yourself that sometimes it's not our reasoning selves that govern us, but our nerves. Even people who are sweeter and less impulsive than me fall into it at certain moments. We need to understand and empathize. As I was telling you earlier, I wanted to write to you this week even because I had lots of little things to tell you, but I couldn't even find the words to tell you what I wanted to say. Tonight I just couldn't resist, for better or for worse I wanted to write you this letter, also because I wanted you to have these documents... I'd like to tell you more about other little things concerning your arrival, but since they are of minor importance, I'll keep them for another letter, when my heart will be happier. I ask you, please, *mio vecio* (my dear old man) write to me, I need to hear from you especially now. ... I'm so happy to hear how much your visit was appreciated by my family back home. Oh! I knew it would be so. They're so fond of you! I couldn't stop myself from crying when I read your descriptions and heard you speaking of my dearly beloveds, and my little and dear country, as it is always in my heart! But perhaps it's best not to talk about these things... one thing remains for me, one hope and that is to see you again, to talk to you of everything I've seen and lived, and everything we are living! But, why, why are you not writing?... I'm going to sleep now, hoping that

tomorrow is a new day, a day that will bring me your news... *mio amore*, I send you my dearest and most ardent *baci*.¹¹⁴

Arguably the most emotionally volatile of the letter-series is the collection written by Giordano to Ester. In nearly all of the over one hundred letters archived, the message is clear: Giordano was struggling with Ester's migration to Canada and her physical separation from his life. Here is one striking illustration that illustrates Giordano's mood fluctuating from hope, nostalgia, and insecurity to curiosity, jealousy, sarcasm, and self-criticism, and finally back to hope again:

Ester, *Carissima*, here I am again sitting at the table to write to you, if I could I'd stay here all day to write to you, because when I write, I have the impression that I'm talking to you, it doesn't feel like you are thousands and thousands of kilometres away. *Caro Amore*, if you only knew how much I miss you, I spend my entire days thinking of you! *Cara Ester*, you know what I say? That I love you so much, and that you are my only hope! Do you still love me? How much time do I still need to wait before I can hold you again?? How much I wish that day would be tomorrow. *Cara*, what did you do today? Did you work? Or did you go out with some handsome Canadian guy? No!! I'm joking, I know very well that you would not do this wrong to me (if wrong is what we can call it). Do you know what I did today?.... *Signorina*, this is the two million lire question... you have one minute to answer it...

¹¹⁴ "Mio amato Maurizio,, se ho un pò ritardato nel dare mie notizie non è altro che perché attendevo risposta di quelle due che ti ho inviato tempo addietro, ho atteso tutta questa settimana con un'ansietà che lascio a te pensare, telefonavo ogni giorno all'ora del riposo alla mamma per sapere qualche cosa, ma la risposta era sempre negativa, ho ricevuto sì quella che hai spedito da Ampezzo (da notare) con 15 giorni di distacco l'una dall'altra poi più niente, cos'è successo? Dimmi tu cosa devo pensare? O vuoi forse farmi impazzire? Oh Maurizio così non si fa, se mi serbi rancore per quella lettera che in un momento di disgusto e di scontento ho scritto, fai male, molto male! Tu lo puoi sapere che qualche volta proprio non siamo noi a ragionare bensì i nostri nervi e che anche le persone meno impulsive più docili cadono certe volte, bisogna comprendere, bisogna capire. Come dicevo prima volevo scriverti questa settimana anche perché avevo tante cosette da dirti, ma non trovavo neppure parole per dirti ciò che avrei voluto, questa sera proprio non ho potuto resistere, o bene o male ho voluto comporre questa mia anche per mandarti questo incartamento... Vorrei parlarti di tante altre cosette riguardo la tua venuta ma essendo di minima importanza mi riservo di scrivertele in un'altra, quando avrò il cuore più contento. Ti raccomando mio vecio scrivimi, ne ho bisogno, specie in questo periodo... ti ringrazio di ciò e sono felicissima dell'accoglienza che ti hanno fatto, Oh! lo sapevo che sarebbe stata così essi ti vogliono bene! Non ho potuto fare a meno di piangere leggendo le tue descrizioni e sentendo parlare di persone a me tanto e tanto care, piccolo e caro paese, come sempre l'ho nel cuore! Ma forse è meglio non parlare di ciò perché non farei altro che rimuovere un dolore appena placato, mi rimane una cosa, una speranza di rivedere ancora te, di parlare a te di tutto ciò che ho visto e vissuto, che abbiamo vissuto! Ma perché perché non scrivi?.... Ora vado a riposare sperando che il giorno nuovo mi porti qualche buona... mio amore i baci più ardenti e più cari." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, May 8, 1949. Letter no. 316.

Think carefully before replying... The question is this: what did I do today?.... well, *Signorina*??.... no!! I did not go dancing.... no! I did not go to the movies, nor out with Blondie... I'm sorry *Signorina* di Leonardi, but your time is up, and you've lost the two million. The answer was: "A LOUSY NOTHING." *Mio Tesoro*, don't you think I'm an idiot writing to you these things? I think so. Please ignore them, when we'll be together I'll stop being so foolish.¹¹⁵

Emotional dependency¹¹⁶ is another characteristic of love that is illustrated in the letters between these three couples. It is reflected clearly in the happiness that letter-writers described upon receiving good news from their beloved. The following excerpts show how these letters-writers were emotionally dependent on each other, and how a declaration from their beloved empowered and transformed them. For instance, upon finding a letter waiting for him as he returned from work, Dante immediately felt the impulse to share his happiness with Sara by writing: "*Cara Sara*, yesterday on Saturday, I returned from work. I was a little tired and my cousin had an intuition. Better than this it could not have been: your letter. As soon as I saw it, I was no longer tired, and my heart

¹¹⁵ "*Ester Carissima, eccomi di nuovo seduto al tavolo per scriverti, se potessi vorrei stare tutto il giorno a scriverti poiché quando ti sto scrivendo ho l'impressione di conversare con te; non mi sembra che stai lontano migliaia e migliaia di chilometri, Caro Amore, sapessi quanto mi manchi; tutto il giorno non faccio altro che pensare a te! Cara Ester, lo sai che ti dico!? che ti amo tanto, e che sei l'unica mia speranza! mi vuoi ancora bene? quanto tempo debbo ancora aspettare prima che ti possa riabbracciare?? quanto vorrei che quel giorno fosse domani, cara, che cosa hai fatto oggi? hai lavorato? oppure sei stata a spasso con un bel Canadese? no!! scherzo so' benissimo che non mi farai questo torto (se torto lo si può chiamare) sai che cosa ho fatto io?..... signorina questa è la domanda da due milioni..... lei ha un minuto a sua disposizione per rispondere..... rifletta bene, prima di rispondere..... la domanda è questa, "che cosa ho fatto oggi?"..... ebbene, signorina??.... no!! non sono andato a ballare.... no! nemmeno al cinema, neppure sono uscito con la bionda.... mi dispiace Signorina di Leonardi, ma il momento è scaduto e lei ha perso i due milioni, la risposta era questa: 'SCHIFO.' Tesoro non mi trovi cretino a scriverti queste cose?? Credo di sì, non ci fare caso, quando saremo insieme smetterò di farlo!!"* Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 25, 1957. Letter no. 364. A part of the narrative in this excerpt recalls the T.V. game show that was extremely popular in postwar Italy, and it was called, *Lascia o Raddoppia*.

¹¹⁶ Emotional dependency is viewed in anthropology as a feature of romantic love. Refer to, Helen Harris, "Rethinking Polynesian Heterosexual Relationships: A Case Study on Mangaia, Cook Islands," *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, ed. William Jankowiak (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 95-127.

jumped for joy. It was like seeing all three of you here. From this, you can surely understand how happy I feel.”¹¹⁷

Although many letters delivered good news, others brought bad news, while silence offered no news or opened the door to negative speculation. When this occurred, feelings of sorrow, melancholy, desolation, and even desperation often overtook the letter-writers. The following sequence of letters illustrates my point by revealing notes of apology and sorrow that had resulted from a misunderstanding by Dante of a previous letter his wife had written:

Cara moglie, within a short time from my previous letter, I cannot avoid writing to you, because I just cannot accept everything that you have just told me in your letter, and I ask you to forgive me in the way I reacted in my response, but, if you only knew how badly I felt, and how I continue to feel, you would not judge me... Now that I write to you I feel a little better, but the other day, I was beside myself. Even my cousins noticed it as I have never been like this before...¹¹⁸

The following exchange between Clara and Maurizio underscores the dynamic of emotional dependency in love correspondence as she experienced sadness and melancholy as a result of his sorrow:

Afterwards, when I read your letter the second time, I understood everything, and was immediately sorry, deeply sorrowed as I read your expressions that were replete with sadness and melancholy, I didn't expect such a letter. I thought the holidays would bring you a little joy.... This was my wish that I've hoped for you and always will. I wanted you to be happy even if you missed me, that you would have

¹¹⁷ “*Cara Sara, Ieri sabato, tornato dal lavoro un pò stanco, Il cugino mi ha presentativ , e migliore di quello non poteva essere, la tua lettera; e al solo vederla la stanchezza è passata, ed il mio cuore si è aperto, come avessi visto voi tre in persona, da questo devi capire quanta è stata la mia gioia.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, April 22, 1956. Letter no. 162.

¹¹⁸ “*Cara moglie, a breve distanza dall'altra, non posso fare a meno di tornarti a scrivere, perché proprio non riesco ad abituarvi al pensiero di ciò che mi hai detto nella tua, e ti domando scusa di come ti ho risposto, ma se tu sapessi quanto male sono stato, e come tuttora mi trovo, non potresti giudicare.....ora che ti scrivo sono un pò calmo ma l'altro giorno ero fuori di me, i cugini si sono accorti perche non ero mai stato così... .*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, June 18, 1956. Letter no. 145.

the best memories possible of Christmas ...so that you would not suffer, but that's not the way it was for you.¹¹⁹

On the same subject Clara wrote in a subsequent letter:

Some time ago, I received your letter in which you tell me that you are recovering, you can't imagine how sorry I felt knowing you were ill, despite it not being serious. This is what it means to be apart from each other, the person you love the most in the world is suffering and you are totally unaware of it. You cannot comfort him. You cannot diminish his pain. It's terrible! However, now that I know that you are feeling better, I am very happy...¹²⁰

Finally, after receiving good news from Maurizio, there was optimism in Clara's letters:

"During this time, I received two of your letters, one on Monday, and the other one, yesterday. You can't imagine how relieved I am to read them and how much happiness they bring to me...¹²¹

The joy that Giordano felt at receiving happy, encouraging news from Ester is reflected in his letters to her, nearly all of which begin: "*Sogno mio* (My dream), last night I received your letter No. 6 including the 3 photos. You can't imagine my joy when I receive news from you..."¹²²; or "*Tesoro mio*, yesterday I received your letter No. 7—

¹¹⁹ "*Ma poi la seconda volta che lessi ben compresi tutto e rimasi molto ma molto addolorata nel leggere le tue espressioni così tristi e malinconiche non mi aspettavo una lettera simile, credevo che i giorni delle feste ti portassero un pò di contento... e questo era l'augurio che ti ho fatto e che sempre ripeterò, volevo che tu fossi felice anche se io ti mancavo, che tu abbassi il più possibile il ricordo dei Natali... tanto per non soffrire, ma così non è stato.*" Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, January 6, 1949. Letter no. 319.

¹²⁰ "*Ho ricevuto tempo fa la tua lettera scritta che ancora eri convalescente, non puoi immaginare quanto mi ha dispiaciuto il saperti ammalato seppure non grave, ecco cosa vuol dire essere lontani, la tua persona più cara soffre e tu non sai nulla, tu non puoi consolarla, tu non puoi lenire il suo dolore; è terribile! Però ti so bene ora e questo mi fa molto piacere...*" Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, February 15, 1949. Letter no. 313.

¹²¹ "*In questo frattempo ho ricevuto due tue lettere, una lunedì e una ieri, non puoi immaginare quanto trovi solievo nel leggerle e quanta felicità essi mi portano...*" Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 14, 1948. Letter no. 315.

¹²² "*Sogno mio, ieri sera mi è arrivata la tua lettera No. 6 con le 3 fotografie non ti immagini la mia gioia quando ricevo tue notizie...*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, June 15, 1957. Letter no. 389.

thank you so much! You make me so happy when you write to me. *Amore mio*, I love you so so much... .”¹²³ Like Clara’s descriptions of how longing affected her state of mind, Giordano also described his sadness at missing Ester since her departure. He wrote: “Here in Italy, Spring has arrived. People often tell me, ‘Don’t you see what beautiful days we’re having?’ But for me, these things don’t exist anymore. Do you know why? Because I miss you.”¹²⁴

According to Lystra, “simply thinking of the lover,”¹²⁵ helped to build bridges. Some couples attempted to compensate for the reality of their separation by writing almost daily to each other. For example, in Sara’s case the act of writing letters was an important part of her daily existence. In this letter excerpt, she confided to her husband the necessity of writing to him: “three days that you don’t write to me and I am immediately anxious. The more time passes, the more I write with greater difficulty, but everyday I write to you, later I’ll tear them up... it’s a way for me to release my anxiety.”¹²⁶ At the other end of the wire, meanwhile, Dante became concerned when he did not receive any news from his wife for several days, and also turned to writing as a

¹²³ “*Tesoro mio, ieri ho ricevuto la tua lettera No. 7, grazie mille! Mi rendi tanto felice scrivendomi; Amore mio, ti voglio tanto tanto bene... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, June 16, 1957. Letter no. 391.

¹²⁴ “*Qui in Italia è cominciata la primavera, spesso mi dicono ‘Non vedi che belle giornate? non senti che si incomincia a vivere?’ ma per me queste cose non esistono più, sai perché? perché mi manchi tu.*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

¹²⁵ Lystra 52.

¹²⁶ “*tre giorni che non scrivi sono subito in ansia più il tempo passa più mi viene da scriverti male ma ogni giorno scrivo poi le stracerò...è uno sfogo.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, May 1956 estimated. Letter no. 97.

form of therapy: "I started writing to you with my *pensiero* for all of you, so that I could calm this angst that continues to wear me down... ." ¹²⁷

In her correspondence with her sweetheart, Maurizio, Clara confided that she was comforted by the words in his letters:

Last night, I went with *papà* and *mamma* to see an Italian movie, "*La Traviata*". Giovanna and Marco came with us as well.... Oh, what a movie ... truly beautiful, and that music, how much it brought me back to you. Did you see it? If you haven't, don't miss it. It's worth seeing. I reread your last two letters. In them I find so much true love, so much affection... so much comfort for me in these words, that you cannot imagine. They bring me everything I need to continue to love, to hope, like thousands and thousands of girls. ¹²⁸

For Giordano, writing to Ester was also an important source of comfort and solace as well as a necessity for his emotional survival: "*Amore mio, ti amo tanto* (I love you so much). As I write to you I look at your photo, and do you know what I tell you? That you are truly a beautiful girl (and one day, you'll be a beautiful lady, *Signora* Rossini, how does it sound to you?)" ¹²⁹ In another letter, he wrote: "as I write to you, your photograph is before me (the one you took in Portugal). You are so beautiful!!" ¹³⁰ And, while at work

¹²⁷ "*mi sono messo a scrivere, con il pensiero rivolto a voi giusto per calmare questa ansia continua che mi rode dentro... .*" Letter from Dante del Moro and Sara Franceschetti, June 22, 1956. Letter no. 150.

¹²⁸ "*Ieri sera sono andata con papà e mamma a vedere un film italiano "la traviata" con Giovanna e Marco... oh che film... Veramente bello, e quella musica quanto mi ha fatto pensare a te. L'hai visto tu? Va se non sei stato, merita. Ho riletto le tue due ultime lettere, trovo in esse tanto sincero amore e tanto affetto... tanto conforto dalle tue parole che non puoi immaginare, esse mi portano tutto ciò che mi occorre per poter ancora amare, ancora sperare come migliaia e migliaia di fanciulle.*" Letter from Carla Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, October 30, 1948. Letter no. 321.

¹²⁹ "*Amore mio ti amo tanto, mentre ti scrivo ho davanti a me la tua fotografia, lo sai che ti dico? che sei veramente una bella ragazza (e un giorno diventerai una bella signora, la signora ROSSINI, ti pare?)... .*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 18, 1957. Letter no. 404.

¹³⁰ "*mentre scrivo ho la vostra fotografia davanti a me (quella che vi siete fatti in Portogallo) sei tanto bella!!*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 25, 1957. Letter no. 410.

in Livorno, he wrote: "I'm taking advantage of a little free time for me to write to you these two lines. If I don't write to you, I feel terrible... ." ¹³¹

"The letter-writer," Janet Altman observes, "is always in dialogue with a possible respondent,...[and] any letter appears as part of a potentially ongoing sequence." ¹³² As participants in an epistolary dialogue ¹³³ of love, correspondents exchanged questions and answers in their letters. This strategy of asking questions, and providing answers was a way of sustaining dialogue and maintaining active engagement to ensure that the letter-writer was not forgotten or neglected.

Giordano Rossini, for instance, even went so far as to give instructions to Ester on how to respond to his letters. In this excerpt, he asked Ester if she could number her letters to him in order for both of them to keep track of their letters and maintain as much as possible an uninterrupted flow of dialogue between them: "*Cara*, you should do one thing, that is, as soon as you receive this letter, the first one that you'll write to me afterwards should be identified as No. I, and then as follows, do you understand? That is, the one that follows number I will be number II, so that I can keep track of all the letters, do you agree?? This one is my No. I." ¹³⁴ In addition, Giordano also asked Ester if she

¹³¹ "*approffitto di un pò di tempo per scriverti ancora due righe, se non ti scrivo mi sento male... .*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 27, 1957. Letter no. 366.

¹³² Altman 148.

¹³³ For the dialogic element in letters of migration, David Gerber draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on language and conversation, and suggests, "in personal letters the voice of the other is always present, for the letter-writer composes for a particular, known individual in a process that is an implicit conversation with, or a psychological probing of, the addressee. Conversation or correspondence, much of the creative activity in living, consists of anticipating responses to one's utterances and, in consequence, crafting one's responses in certain ways suited to the other, while attempting not to sacrifice one's own individuality." Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 72.

¹³⁴ "*Cara, dovresti fare una cosa, cioè appena ricevi questa lettera, la prima che mi scrivi la dovresti numerare col No. I, poi via di seguito, mi hai capito? Cioè quella che seguirà la lettera numero I sarà il*

could keep his letter in front of her as she wrote to him so that she could address ALL of his questions. Not content with these requests, he also asked her to write to him more often, using tighter, smaller handwriting so she can include more in her letters, and he would thus have more to read about her: "Can you write to me more often? Instead of waiting for my letter and answering it, can you write to me even before receiving my mail; if you have time, of course! And when you write to me, can you write in smaller handwriting so that you can include more in the letters."¹³⁵ When it seemed to him that her commitment in writing to him was waning, he wrote: "it seems to me that when you write, you're in a hurry. It seems like you're writing to me without too much involvement on your part. No! *Cara Ester*, please don't be offended. I know it's not as it appears, this is why I said, 'it seems.' Surely, you have a good reason for this."¹³⁶

Another way writers made sure that their loved ones would respond to their letters was by making an explicit epistolary agreement (le pacte épistolaire) to maintain the correspondence, as Clara wrote in her letter to Maurizio on November 14, 1948:

You can't imagine how comforted I am to read your letters and how much happiness they bring to me, for this I ask you, I beg you to write to me, to write to me: once a week punctually, I'll try to do the same so that neither of us needs to suffer... one line, one short letter is all we need... but the flow must be constant, lively and continuous because if one day that disappears, it's all over.¹³⁷

numero II, così che mi possa accorgere se mi giungono tutte d'accordo?? questa è la mia No. I." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 2, 1957. Letter no. 370.

¹³⁵ "*Potresti scrivermi più spesso? Invece di aspettare la mia lettera e rispondermi, potresti scrivermi anche prima di ricevere la mia posta; sempre se hai tempo! e poi quando scrivi dovresti scrivere più piccolo in modo che c'entra di più.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 7, 1957. Letter no. 358.

¹³⁶ "*mi sembra che, quando scrivi, hai molta fretta, sembra quasi che mi scrivi senza tanto impegno, no! Cara Ester, non ti devi offendere, so che non è così, perciò ho detto 'sembra' hai certamente una ragione più fondata.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 3, 1957. Letter no. 371.

¹³⁷ "*non puoi immaginare quanto trovi solievo nel leggerle e quanta felicità essi mi portano, per questo ti chiedo e ti prego di scrivermi, di scrivermi: una volta per settimana puntualmente, cercherò di farlo anch'io affinché nessuno dei due abbia a soffrire...basta una frase, una breve lettera,... il filo deve essere costante,*

Not only was letter-writing a practice akin to personal presence, as Lystra suggests, but through love letters, correspondents allowed themselves to “feel” the presence of their beloved. We observe this phenomenon in the following sequence of excerpts. For instance, to help comfort Sara, Dante asked her to imagine him with her at night:

Do you know what you should do?... When the children are asleep, and it's late, and you're in bed, turn off the light. Turn to one side of the bed. Rest your cheek on the pillow to sleep. You'll find that after a while you'll feel a tender caress and the endearing breath near your lips of the man who has loved you so and who will love you forever.¹³⁸

The letters of Giordano to Ester also illustrate this observation: “when I write to you, I feel you close to me. It feels like I’m talking to you, so much so that I would never want to stop writing to you.”¹³⁹ After visiting a church with his grandmother, and reminiscing about when Ester was there too, he described to Ester his near-spiritual experience of “feeling her presence,” as he wrote: “as I concentrated on praying, suddenly I felt you close to me, like that Christmas day!! *Amore mio*, there is no place that does not remind me of you.”¹⁴⁰

The writers’ imaginative act of appealing to the heavens to bring a message of love was another quasi-poetic, quasi-religious mechanism for letter-writers to bridge

vivo, duraturo perché se quello un giorno svanisse tutto sarebbe finito.” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 14, 1948. Letter no. 315.

¹³⁸“*Sai cosa devi fare?... Quando a una certa ora... sei a letto, spegni la luce, girati in parte, metti la guancia nel cuscino e dormi, vedrai che dopo un pò sentirai una tenera carezza e l'alito caldo vicino alla tua bocca di colui che tanto ti ha amato e sempre ti amerà.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, May 23, 1956. Letter no. 140.

¹³⁹“*quando ti scrivo ti sento vicino, mi sembra di parlarti, cosiché non vorrei mai finire una lettera.*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 7, 1957. Letter no. 418.

¹⁴⁰“*mentre stavo intento a pregare, mi è sembrato che d'improvviso mi stessi vicino, come quel giorno di Natale!! Amore mio, non c'è posto che non mi ricorda di te... .*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 19, 1957. Letter no. 360.

distances.¹⁴¹ In his letters to Ester, Giordano invoked the stars to bring Ester his message of love in an effort to reach out to her in that precise moment beyond the temporal and physical realities that confined him. As the illustration shows, this is a particular moment in which Giordano felt impelled to reach Ester immediately and his imagination offered him the only possible means of doing so:

before I close, I want to tell you that I saw our star tonight and it seemed to be saying to me: 'Ester sends you many many kisses and is always thinking of you' to which I answered: "*Cara stellina* (Dear little star), bring many *bacioni al mio Amore* (big kisses to my beloved) who is so far away from me. Tell her that I will love her for all my life. Tell her not to forget me.' Until tomorrow, *Amore carissimo*."¹⁴²

In his work published posthumously, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, "The imagination," Italian literary scholar Italo Calvino writes, "is a kind of electronic machine that takes account of all possible combinations and chooses the ones that are appropriate to a particular purpose, or are simply the most interesting, pleasing, or amusing."¹⁴³ Indeed, in the letters of all three series, imagination played a central role in re-evoking the presence of the absent loved one through the construction or reconstruction of events

¹⁴¹ The appearance of poetry or poetic devices in love letters is not an anomaly. Bernard Bray suggests, "c'est là qu'on peut observer comme l'amour tel qu'il s'écrit est différent de l'amour tel qu'il se parle, ou tel qu'il se vit. L'amoureux se fait poète, et la poésie lui ouvre des domaines infinis d'expressions imagées, que seule justifie l'écriture." Bray 41. Nor is invoking the heavens to serve as messengers of love a novelty in the Italian literary tradition. From my knowledge, throughout the centuries of Italian literature, poets have appealed to the stars, the sun and the moon to bring their greetings and their love to their lover. In most of the literature, the recipient of this stellar message is the woman whom the poet is in love with. One poet who stands above many who plead to the heavens for their love, in the Italian literary tradition is the 19th century poet and philosopher, Giacomo Leopardi.

¹⁴² "*prima di concludere voglio dirti che ho visto la nostra stella e mi è sembrato che mi dicesse 'Ester ti manda tanti tanti baci ed pensa sempre a te' a ciò ho risposto: 'Cara stellina, porta tanti bacioni al mio Amore che mi sta così lontano e dille che l'amerò per tutta la vita, e dille che non mi dimenticasse.' a domani Amore Carissimo.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 19, 1957. Letter no. 360.

¹⁴³ Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988) 91.

from the past, in the present and the future. As Bernard Bray suggests, these temporal travels of the imagination offer letter-writers, “la promesse du voyage, la description du nid future ou de n’importe quel ailleurs heureux. Ce peut être aussi la mention d’un ‘lieu mémoratif’ surgi d’un souvenir commun...”¹⁴⁴

In the correspondence between Dante and Sara, for instance, Dante looked ahead into the future and imagined his life with Sara and their children in Powell River:

*Mia cara, ...I hope you will be happy here and thankful,
...Think that all you need to do are the groceries, bring the little ones to the nursery school, and everything else. You’ll see that this is more useful than reading the magazines *Grand Hotel* and *Intimità*... Think only that while I’ll be at work, you will have nothing else to do but prepare the meals, the best you can, and patiently wait for the return of your loved ones to gather at the daily table.*¹⁴⁵

Clara also imagined what life would be like for her and Maurizio once he would have joined her, and they became married. For instance, she wrote that there would be a greater understanding between them, and that neither of them would have to suffer alone for they would have each other: “Oh! We don’t live only on bread, as you correctly wrote one day... it’s logical that you can’t have everything you want in life. I know this for sure. I know we will have our share of sorrows as well, but we’ll be able to overcome them, it will be the two of us then, we won’t be alone.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, as Clara wrote, Maurizio would participate in the building of their house together with her parents: “the

¹⁴⁴ Bray 42-43.

¹⁴⁵ “*Mia cara, ... spero ti troverai contenta mi ringrazierai, se solo pensi che devi arrangiarti di fare la spesa, di portare i piccoli o all’asilo o alla scuola, e poi tutto il resto, vedrai che questo è più utile che non il Grand Hotel ed Intimità... pensa solo che io sono al lavoro, e tu non hai da far altro che far da mangiare, il meglio possibile, ed attendere con pazienza il ritorno dei tuoi cari per il desco quotidiano.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 24, 1956. Letter no. 164.

¹⁴⁶ “*Oh! Non si vive di solo pane e tu ben giustamente l’hai scritto un giorno in una tua... è ben logico che dalla vita non si possa avere tutto ciò che si desidera, ed io lo so benissimo questo, so che avremo i nostri dispiaceri ugualmente, ma sapremo ben sopportarli, saremo in due dopo, non saremo soli.*” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, May 27, 1949. Letter no. 322.

other night we were talking and my father said, 'if Maurizio comes, he'll give me a hand'... I have no doubt about that, since I know how much you enjoy working. Right, Maurizio? And anyway, we're talking about our little house."¹⁴⁷

In his daily entries to Ester, Giordano's reminiscence of his past days with Ester evoked very strong images that moved from the past to the future. For instance, in one letter he described his feelings when he first laid eyes on her on the beaches of Ostia, and how he imagined his life with her in Rome. In another letter, he described a scenario of their lives together set far into the future:

last night for the first time, I saw a comet. I went into the terrasse and there!! In the midst of thousands of stars, with its luminescent tail was the comet! So that when we'll be old, we'll be able to tell our children, or even our grandchildren. Don't you think so?...When our children will ask us, 'Mamma, did you ever see a comet? What's it like?' to which you will say, 'go to papà, he saw one once. Ask him to tell you all about it.' And so, I, with all the patience in the world, will explain to them that one day in the distant past of 1957, I went to the terrasse and ... so on...¹⁴⁸

Closely related to these imagined scenarios were various references in the letters to dreams. In many cases, letter-writers referred generally, indeed almost reflexively, to the act of dreaming about their partner. For example, Dante wrote to his wife that, "I

¹⁴⁷ "l'altra sera appunto se ne parlava anzi ha detto, 'se verrà Maurizio mi darà un colpo di mano.' Io neppure lontanamente dubito il contrario perché so quanto ami il lavoro, vero Maurizio? E poi si tratta della nostra casetta." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, February 15, 1949. Letter no. 313.

¹⁴⁸ "ieri sera per la prima volta in vita mia ho visto una cometa, sono andato sulla terrazza è là!!... in mezzo alle altre migliaia di stelle, con la sua coda luminosa, c'era la cometa! così quando saremo vecchi, potremo raccontarlo ai nostri figli o anche ai nostri nipoti, non ti pare?... allora quando un giorno i nostri figli ci domanderanno 'Mamma hai mai visto una cometa? Come è fatta?' allora tu dirai, 'andate da papà, lui l'ha vista, fatevelo spiegare com'era.' Così io, con santa pazienza glielo spiegherò come un lontano giorno del 1957, sono andato sulle terrazze e..... così via...." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 25, 1957. Letter no. 364.

hold you all close to my heart with enormous love... dream of me, as I dream of you always.”¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Clara exclaimed to Maurizio:

I remember every song, every detail, and often reality calls on me while my gaze and my thoughts are absent... Isn't it strange? Not so much perhaps for someone who knows what it means to love, what would I do if I cannot remember the past? And only I know when I can evoke it again, and when that happens, I'd like to dream. I'd like to fall asleep and wake up only with you near me. Of course that would be too beautiful, unfortunately I have to wait and open my eyes to my reality.”¹⁵⁰

Giordano often wrote to Ester at the end of his day, when he was ready to fall asleep and hopefully dream of her. In one letter, he wrote: “Forgive me if this letter has no beginning and no end, but I'm very tired. I'll write to you again tomorrow. And so, I wish you a good night, and I hope to meet you in my dreams. See you soon, *Amore mio—non ti scordar di me* (do not forget me).”¹⁵¹

But in some respects what is more interesting are the instances when letter-writers recounted particular dreams involving their lovers. According to David Fitzpatrick, the report of a dream was a vehicle through which “immediacy could be invoked, in an imagined present.”¹⁵² Thus, Giordano was quick to recount the following dream to Ester:

¹⁴⁹ “*vi stringo al mio cuore, sempre con grande amore... sognami, che io ti sogno sempre.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, August 25, 1956. Letter no. 175.

¹⁵⁰ “*mi ricordo, ogni canzoni, ogni cosa e spesso mi chiama alla realtà mentre il mio sguardo e il mio pensiero sono assenti... è strano vero? Non tanto per chi sa cosa vuol dire amare, che cosa dovrei fare io se non ricordare il passato? E solo [io] so quando posso rievocarlo ed allora sempre vorrei sognare, vorrei potermi addormentare e risvegliarmi solo quando tu fossi vicino a me, ma ciò sarebbe troppo bello, purtroppo devo aspettare ed aprire gli occhi alla realtà.*” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, January 15, 1949. Letter no. 311.

¹⁵¹ “*Scusami se questa lettera non ha capo ne coda ma sono molto stanco; riprenderò a scriverti domani, perciò ti auguro una buona notte e spero di incontrarti nel sogno, a presto Amore mio—non ti scordar di me.*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 18, 1957. Letter no. 404. Note the words, “*non ti scordar di me*” are reminiscent of an Italian song of the Bel Canto that was very popular in the 1950s, entitled, “Non ti scordar di me” composed by Ernesto De Curtis in the mid-1930s.

¹⁵² Fitzpatrick 494.

Last night I dreamt of you. We were together at Nietti's. There was a party and you were wearing a black skirt and a light blue pullover. You looked beautiful as always. Suddenly, everyone disappeared, and we found ourselves locked in each other's arms. And just as I kissed you, I woke up. What a beautiful dream...it all seemed so real, so realistic. Unfortunately, like all dreams even this one vanished into a cloud of smoke. How much I would love to hold you and kiss you on your sweet pink lips.¹⁵³

In these cases, it seems that the act of dreaming functioned both to trigger the imagination of correspondents and to bridge the distance between lovers through a recounting of the experience.

Marie-Claire Grassi writes, "Abolir le temps et la distance est ici comme entre tous les êtres séparés la première fonction de la lettre, matérialisation éphémère de l'être aimé."¹⁵⁴ The notions of time and space are central to the practice of letter-writing in a context of migration, and according to Altman the temporal polyvalence that is often evoked in letters is crucial to understanding the way messages about events are perceived. These oscillations are also witnessed in love letters of migration as we read in the writings of Giordano to Ester:

Carissima (futura mogliettina)... when you return, we'll go back to the Colosseum and read again the inscription we left on that distant day in 1956, do you remember? It was raining, and we had walked around the Colosseum 7, 8 times. I was so happy every time I saw you, a strange throb stirred inside of me. It was the emotion, the feeling of sublime

¹⁵³ "ieri notte ti ho sognato, eravamo insieme da Nietti, c'era una festa, avevi la gonna nera e il pullover celeste eri bella come sempre poi tutt'a un tratto erano scomparsi tutti e ci siamo trovati uno stretto all'altro e proprio mentre ti baciavo, mi sono svegliato, com'era bello quel sogno, sembrava tutto vero, tutto così realistico; ma purtroppo come tutti i sogni anche quello svanì come una nube di fumo, quanto vorrei stringerti e baciarti sulla tua rosea bocca!'" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 20, 1957. Letter no. 406.

¹⁵⁴ Grassi, "Des lettres qui parlent d'amour" 23-24.

happiness that came with seeing you. *Amore mio*, now when I think of you, a sharp pain pierces my heart... ”¹⁵⁵

Some of the temporal oscillations that occurred in letter-writing were a function of the social conventions of what Dauphin calls “temps épistolaire.”¹⁵⁶ And, as David Gerber shows, time consciousness was also accentuated by the rhythm of the “modern” postal system.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, time in relation to separation, however, was also a source of conversation in the letters I examined. For instance, a common complaint found in the letters is the writers’ frustration with time and the slow passing of time. Sara’s words to Dante illustrate my point: “*caro*, it was exactly three months since the day you left. It feels like yesterday, and an eternity.”¹⁵⁸ Moreover, she wrote, “today is September 3rd and it’s now 6 months since you left. It feels like 6 centuries, not 6 months. You can just

¹⁵⁵ “*Carissima (futura mogliettina)... quando tornerai andremo al Colosseo per rivedere l’iscrizione che abbiamo fatto in un giorno lontano 1956, ti ricordi? era quel giorno che pioveva, in cui abbiamo fatto 7, 8 volte il giro del Colosseo, ero tanto felice, ogni volta che ti dovevo vedere mi prendeva un strano fremito, era l’emozione, era la contentezza di vedere te Amore mio; ora invece quando ti penso, mi sento una stretta al cuore...* ” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 4, 1957. Letter no. 355.

¹⁵⁶ My understanding of Dauphin’s “le temps épistolaire” is that it encompasses the temporal dynamics involved in the waiting, reading, writing practices of a letter. She suggests, “l’écriture épistolaire exteriorise, cristallise et accentue la discontinuité de la communication orale en lui conférant une dimension spatiale et temporelle qui permet ainsi de la soumettre à d’éventuelles manipulations. Mais la communication écrite crée aussi son propre rituel dans un cadre temporel codifié. D’abord, l’échange est ponctué par l’attente de la réponse. ... Cette obligation, qui relève du code de la politesse, traduit en fait un rapport au temps spécifique de la correspondance. Contrairement à la communication orale, l’échange peut être à tout moment interrompu. Il est en tout cas différée, le temps qu’il faut pour transporter la lettre et la réponse... Le rapport au temps s’exprime encore dans le déroulement du cycle annuel avec ses temps forts et récurrents... et avec ses temps morts que la lettre doit remplir.... Le temps de l’écriture épistolaire tel qu’il est inscrit dans les manuels détermine différents cycles qui s’emboîtent, structurent la vie sociale et affective. Surtout, il implique une disponibilité sans laquelle la communication écrite serait difficile.” Cécile Dauphin, “Les manuels épistolaires au XIXe siècle.” Chartier, *La correspondance* 235-236.

¹⁵⁷ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 149-154.

¹⁵⁸ “*caro, ieri sono stati tre mesi che sei partito mi sembra ieri e un eternità.*” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, estimated May 11, 1956. Letter no. 97.

imagine how eagerly I await that blessed day of our departure... ”¹⁵⁹ In anticipation of his family’s arrival, Dante wrote: “at this point for you *miei cari* (my dear ones), the wait is not a question of months, but days. For me, instead it’s just as long, and to tell you the truth, I have been calm and patient until now. But now, I don’t know why, a day feels like a month... ”¹⁶⁰

The slow passage of time is also observed in the correspondence between Clara and Maurizio, in which Clara wrote: “Nearly two months have passed since we left each other, I don’t know how you feel about it. Sometimes it feels like I arrived only yesterday. Other times, it feels I’ve been here forever. Oh! If only it were so, how much happier I would be if at least two years would be behind me, then there would be less time to wait for you.”¹⁶¹ Giordano’s letters to Ester are another a case in point: “*Amore mio*, this evening I felt particularly alone... Oh!! Ester! How I love you!! How much time needs to pass before I can see you again?? Time moves too slowly, and I miss you more and more every day... ”¹⁶² In an attempt to negotiate further the temporal separation between him and his beloved, Giordano went to such lengths as to reconfigure the perception of time so that it did not appear so long: “Now, I don’t need to think anymore

¹⁵⁹ “oggi è il 3 sett. e sono 6 mesi che sei partito mi sembrano 6 secoli non mesi così puoi immaginare come aspetto quel benedetto giorno della partenza...” Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, September 3, 1956. Letter no. 83.

¹⁶⁰ “oramai per voi miei cari, non va più a mesi, bensì a giorni invece per me e alquanto più lunga, e per dirti il vero fin’ora ero calmo e paziente, ma adesso, non so il perché, un giorno mi sembra un mese...” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, September 12, 1956. Letter no. 172.

¹⁶¹ “Quasi due mesi fa ci siamo lasciati, non so quale impressione provi, certe volte mi sembra di essere arrivata ieri, altre invece di essere da molti anni, oh! se fosse veramente così sarei molto più felice, basterebbe che ne fossero passati due allora avrei poco da aspettarti.” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, November 14, 1948. Letter no. 315.

¹⁶² “Amore mio, questa sera mi sentivo particolarmente solo... Oh!! Ester! come ti amo!! quanto tempo deve passare prima che io ti possa rivedere?? il tempo passa troppo piano, e la nostalgia di te aumenta rapidamente...” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 19, 1957. Letter no. 360.

that we have to wait 2 years, but rather 24 months. It feels like less time. Can you wait 24 months? Or is it too much for you?”¹⁶³

Apart from the limits of time, many writers also felt constrained by the space that divided them from their loved ones, and the limitations of letters as a means to express their true feelings. The following letter of Giordano illustrates my point: “*tesoro mio*, I love you, I love you, I love you. These words written on paper do not do justice, they cannot demonstrate their true meaning... when I write to you and say the word ‘love,’ to you, it comes from the depths of my heart, and I say it to you with every breath of my soul!!!”¹⁶⁴ Likewise, Clara also referred to the difficulties of keeping alive her communication with Maurizio using only pen and paper: “It is certainly a continuous tribulation to be so far apart. It’s hard not to be able to express yourself, and allow yourself to be comforted when there’s pain. Let’s hope it won’t be long now.”¹⁶⁵

Through these excerpts, we can appreciate the challenges that the letter-writers experienced first-hand as they each came to terms with the need to channel all of the elements of their love relationship through the medium of prose. As Lystra suggests, “By their own reports, their dialogue on paper felt akin to actual conversations. They told each other that love letters reflected the verbal intimacy of being alone together.”¹⁶⁶ The

¹⁶³ “*ora non penso più che dobbiamo stare lontani 2 anni, ma bensì 24 mesi, mi sembra molto di meno, sarai capace di aspettare 24 mesi? Oppure è troppo per te?*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, April 24, 1957. Letter no. 363.

¹⁶⁴ “*tesoro mio, ti amo, ti amo, ti amo, queste parole così scritte sulla carta, non esprimono, non possono dimostrare il loro vero significato... la parola ‘amore’ quando la scrivo e te la dico, mi viene dal più profondo del cuore, te la dico con tutta l’anima!!!*” Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, May 28, 1957. Letter no. 380.

¹⁶⁵ “*E proprio una continua tribolazione essere così lontani, è duro non potersi esprimere e non potersi far consolare quando qualche pena ci angusta, speriamo sia per poco ancora.*” Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, March 27, 1949. Letter no. 323.

¹⁶⁶ Lystra 4.

following excerpt from a letter from Dante to Sara conveys the point: "I close this poor writing of mine, as I pretend I have been talking to you, one on one... ." ¹⁶⁷

Another tactic that helped letter-writers overcome the spatial and temporal limitations of letters was simply to postpone a discussion to a later date when they would be together. For instance, in the wake of a possible misunderstanding that originated in a discussion between Sara and Dante, Sara wrote: "it's better to talk about this in person when we'll see each other... talking about it directly leads to a better understanding... Don't worry... I'll get by anyway." ¹⁶⁸ By rereading several times Ester's letters, and pretending to be carrying on a conversation with Ester, Giordano also sought ways to negotiate the limitation of the letter and seek comfort from her presence through her letters at the same time: "*Mio caro amore*, here I am again with you. Writing to you is an enormous consolation for me. Did you receive the letter and the postcard that I sent you in Lisbon?" ¹⁶⁹ One week later, again Giordano wrote: "*Vita mia* (My life), I love you so much. I read and reread your letter. As I read it, it seemed like you were here talking to me. I heard your sweet voice, and I saw you before me." ¹⁷⁰ By reading, writing, and rereading the letters they exchanged, lovers separated as a result of migration negotiated the limitations of the process of letter-writing and found some solace.

¹⁶⁷ "*termino questo mio mal scritto e faccio conto di averti parlato a t  per t ... .*" Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, July 2, 1956. Letter no. 137.

¹⁶⁸ "*di questo parleremo meglio personalmente... parlando ci si intende meglio... non rattristarti... me la cavo lo stesso.*" Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, October 3, 1956. Letter no. 82.

¹⁶⁹ "*Mio caro amore, eccomi di nuovo a te, poter scriverti   per me una grande consolazione, hai ricevuto la lettera e la cartolina che ti ho mandato a Lisbona?*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

¹⁷⁰ "*Vita mia, ti voglio tanto bene, ho letto e riletto la tua lettera, leggendo mi sembrava che mi stessi parlando in persona, sentivo la tua dolce voce, ti vedevo davanti a me.*" Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 25, 1957. Letter no. 409.

Finally, what can be observed about the emotional experiences of migrants and their loved ones who remained behind? And, what does a comparison of these experiences reveal about the differing state of minds of these individuals? One of the difficulties in answering these questions stems from the complexities of the emotional stories that the letters offer. However, the analysis has revealed some subtle differences and similarities between the two experiences.

A number of excerpts in the letters illustrate some of the emotions migrants experienced as a result of leaving their families in Italy, and the emotional toll of this experience: For instance, Dante wrote to Sara:

Mia cara, I can imagine your pain... yours is enormous, and mine is even stronger. Because you, at least, are surrounded by our people in our lands that we know, and that somehow you can make it through. But I have no one here I can confide with my sorrows, my pains. Even if I am surrounded by good people who care about me. It's never like having you with me, because you understand what I want to say.¹⁷¹

And over two weeks later, Dante wrote:

You see, *mia cara*... I know you understand these things, but only up to a certain point, because despite everything, you have not experienced yet what it means to be out into the world, away from the affections of your dear ones, away from everything. That is not my case. Against my will, I have experienced this already, prior to now and in other circumstances in which I find myself now.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ “*Mia cara, immagino bene il tuo dolore... il tuo è grande, ed il mio più ancora, perché almeno tu sei ancora fra gente della nostra e nei paesi nostri, che in qualche modo puoi passarla, ma io non ho nessuno di cui confidarmi le mie pene e i miei dolori, anche se sono fra gente amica e buona, ma che non e mai direttamente come fossi te, tu capisci cosa voglio dire,... comunque, mi do coraggio lo stesso.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, June 2, 1956. Letter no. 141.

¹⁷² “*Vedi, mia cara... so che sono cose che tu puoi capirle sì, ma fin a un certo punto, perché nonostante tutto, tu non hai ancora provato cosa vuol dire trovarsi fuori per il mondo lontano dagli affetti più cari, e da tutto, non così per me, che mio malgrado le ho provate prima d'ora, e in circostanze diverse da quella presente.*” Letter from Dante del Moro to Sara Franceschetti, June 18, 1956. Letter no. 145.

In a following letter, we witness Clara reflecting on the emotional meaning of separation as a result of visiting Montreal's airport. Her reference to death and rebirth in relation to departures and arrivals of loved ones is analogous to an element in letters of romantic love in which writers, "ne cessent de référer leur passion au surgissement de la mort, séparation suprême, mais occasion bénie d'une réunion dans l'éternité."¹⁷³ Clara wrote:

Last night in fact I experienced something I have seen in the past. Seeing the air field at Dorval, I can't explain it... the crowds saying goodbye and others greeting those arriving,... My eyes watched and my mind reflected. Departures bring sadness, arrivals bring happiness. You and I can relate to this a lot because for three years we have been living this, that is, this feeling of dying and living again and then dying again! The last time was the worst, and the most painful of them all. It was the last one, let's call it that, so that your arrival will be the happiest ever, and then nothing will separate us, because you'll be here *sempre* (forever), never to leave me again, and I will never leave you. I'll follow you wherever you go, even to the end of the earth... If you only knew how I watch other couples, looking carefree as they walk together and smile at each other. How I envy them...¹⁷⁴

The letters of Sara, Maurizio and Giordano offer insights into the emotional experiences of lovers who were left behind. Similar to the letters of Dante and Clara, loneliness and envy of others also resonated: "Caro Dante, I miss you, I give myself courage because I'm hopeful that it won't be long. But I tell you the truth, if it would

¹⁷³ According to Bernard Bray, the letters of Victor Hugo and Juliette Drouet, and Musset and George Sand are a case in point. Bray 45.

¹⁷⁴ "ieri sera appunto vi ho vissuto qualche cosa di quello che già avevo passato, la visita di campo di aviazione di Dorval, non ti so spiegare la sensazione che ho provato ..., la folla che salutava i partenti e altri che salutavano gli arrivati, i miei occhi guardavano e la mia mente meditava, triste la partenza, felice l'arrivo, e di questo noi ne possiamo ben parlare perché stati provati, da tre anni che stiamo provando ciò che vuol dire morire e poi rinascere, rinascere e poi ancora morire! L'ultima partenza è stata la più terribile e la più dolorosa, l'ultima, si chiamamola pure l'ultima, e così l'arrivo che sarà il più felice di tutti i passati, poi nulla più ci dividerà perché tu vieni per sempre, per non lasciarmi mai, ed io non vorrò lasciarti; vorrò seguirti dovunque tu vada, sia pure in capo al mondo... Se tu sapessi come guardo le coppie che spensierate se ne vanno per la strada sorridenti a vicenda, e le invidio..." Letter from Clara Montorio to Maurizio Trevisan, May 27, 1949. Letter no. 322.

need to be for a long time, I could not do it. For one thing, the responsibility of the children and the other, because I can't stand being away from you."¹⁷⁵ And in another letter, Sara wrote: "I'm so worried, I don't sleep any more... try to help me as soon as you can... as I close this letter, I send you my wishes, and I hope that (once in Canada) I will not have these worries any more, as I have them now."¹⁷⁶ In another letter, after having waited for days for news from Dante, she wrote: "I see that you have not forgotten these poor souls who live just waiting for news from my beloved husband. Even Paolo and Elisabetta, every day they ask me, 'did we receive any mail from *papà*?' "¹⁷⁷

Maurizio's letters also illustrate how he felt when Clara left, as he wrote:

Clara *mia cara* and beloved,... in this moment, fourteen days have passed since your departure, or rather from your arrival. How fleeting time is. It passes and moves forwards in an ironic way, and maybe we can be pleased about this. The days pass, and sadly, a void remains in my heart and in my brain... how much sadness and melancholy this day brings to me now...¹⁷⁸

Giordano's letter below shows that as a loved one who stayed behind, he revisited the places he and Ester had visited in the past together. The sadness these visits brought him was evoked in his letter:

¹⁷⁵ "Caro Dante, sento la tua mancanza mi do coraggio perche spero sia per poco ma ti dico la verita se fosse per tanto tempo non ci riuscirei credimi una per la responsabilit  dei bambini e un'altra perch  si sta male separati." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, March 25, 1956. Letter no. 91.

¹⁷⁶ "sono tanto in pensiero non dormo neanche pi ...guarda dunque di aiutarmi pi  presto che puoi... Termino salutandoti tanto e spero dopo di non avere pi  tante preoccupazioni come ne ho ora." Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 17, 1956. Letter no. 87.

¹⁷⁷ "vedo che non ti sei dimenticato di questa povera gente che vive per aspettar notizie dal mio amato marito anche Paolo e Elisabetta ogni giorno domandano,   arrivata posta da pap ?" Letter from Sara Franceschetti to Dante del Moro, August 6, 1956. Letter no. 89.

¹⁷⁸ "Clara mia cara e amata, ... in questo momento quattordici giorni dalla tua partenza, ossia dal tuo arrivo, ecco con quale fugace corsa il tempo passa passa con ironia e forse per noi anche con gioia, passano i giorni e purtroppo, un vuoto nel mio cuore e nel mio cervello... quanta tristezza e malinconia mi porta tanto ora..." Letter from Maurizio Trevisan to Clara Montorio, October 6, 1948. Letter no. 310.

Tonight I went back to the school's front doors, and I saw you again in my imagination. You were standing there waiting for me, like that Tuesday of *Carnevale*. Do you remember? Each memory I have of you hurts me—not physically but spiritually—I saw you in the classroom again where we danced. In my mind I heard the music again playing softly like the day we danced to that magical music that touches hearts and unites them forever. *Amore*, love me *sempre*...¹⁷⁹

The fear of being forgotten was underscored in all three letter-series. Giordano's letters voiced this fear in the strongest terms. In the following, we witness how his fear of being forgotten was expressed in conjunction with Ester's similar fear from an earlier letter: "you wrote to me begging me not to forget you, but in this case, I am the one begging you not to forget me. As far as I'm concerned, you can enjoy yourself as much as you like, I only ask you not to forget that here in Italy, there is someone who waits for you and lives only for you."¹⁸⁰

For Giordano, however, the possibility of being forgotten by his beloved proved real. The physical and temporal distance between Giordano and Ester eventually became overwhelming and proved fatal to the relationship. Giordano's words in his letter of *Addio* (final farewell letter) illustrate the meaning of being left behind as the love relationship with Ester was broken:

Mia cara Ester, this morning I received your letter hoping to find a solution or someway of resolving our situation. I read it at least 10-15 times, but in the end, I was back where I started. I believe the only solution for me is to bury everything deep inside my heart, and carry

¹⁷⁹ "Stasera quando sono tornato davanti al portone della Scuola, ti ho visto, nella mia immaginazione, che stavi là davanti ad attendermi, come quel martedì di Carnevale, ti rammenti? ogni tuo ricordo mi fa' molto male—non fisicamente ma moralmente—ho rivisto l'aula in cui abbiamo ballato, nell'immaginazione ho risentito quella musica languida che ci accompagnava durante il ballo, quella musica magica che intenerisce i cuori e li unisce per sempre; *Amore, amami sempre*..." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 16, 1957. Letter no. 402.

¹⁸⁰ "mi hai scritto pregandomi di non dimenticarti, ma in questo caso sarei io a pregarti di ricordarti di me, per me ti puoi divertire quanto ti pare, ma solo non devi dimenticare che qui in Italia c'è uno che ti aspetta e vive solo per te." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, March 18, 1957. Letter no. 404.

this weight with me all of my life. The word that hurt me the most in your letter was your final 'Addio.' As the last word of your painfully sad and agonizing letter, that 'Addio' struck me like the final blow!! Now, my beloved Ester, my life is worthless. At one time, I lived with the hope of a better tomorrow, in which I would finally be with the person that I love. Now, there is no tomorrow for me as I have no one! ... I want you to know that I don't hold a grudge against you... In the end, you, like me, need affection. The only difference is that you succeeded in finding someone to share this affection with, and I instead, don't know if I ever will... *Cara Ester*, I have nothing else to say, or rather I could keep writing but it doesn't matter anymore!! I beg you to be there when I'll be back next week. Remember that you would be hurting me even more if you decided not to show up... *Carissima*... see you soon... even if we will be apart and leading separate lives, we can still meet again one day...¹⁸¹

In my attempt to make sense of the emotions that were revealed in these letters, it became increasingly clear that the differences in emotional experiences between migrants and loved ones were extremely subtle, if they existed at all. Both perspectives strongly resonated with pleas not to be forgotten, the loneliness and nostalgia of one's beloved, and the envy for other couples who appeared happy together in public. Inevitably, individuals experienced the reality of separation differently because of their particular psychological makeup. But it also seems clear that different writers' responses were heavily shaped by their personal situations as migrants and loved ones, and by the kind of support they received from kin. Significantly, despite the obvious differences in their

¹⁸¹ "Mia cara Ester, questa mattina ho ricevuto la tua lettera con la speranza di trovare qualche soluzione o rimedio l'ho riletta almeno 10-15 volte, ma alla fine ero al punto di partenza, credo che l'unica soluzione, per me, sia quella di seppellire tutto in fondo al cuore e portarlo per tutta la vita, la parola che mi ha fatto più male nella tua lettera è stata l'ultima, 'Addio', quel 'addio' messo là in calce ad una lettera così triste e quasi angosciata, era proprio come il colpo di grazia!! Ora mia amata Ester, per me la vita non ha più nessun valore, una volta vivevo con la speranza di un domani migliore e di potermi unire alla persona amata, ora non ho più domani poiché non ho più nessuno! ... sappi che non ti porto rancore per quello che mi hai fatto, infondo tu, come io, abbiamo bisogno d'affetto, solo che tu sei riuscita a trovare la persona alla quale affezionarti, io invece non so se riuscirò... *Cara Ester*, non ho altro da dirti, o meglio avrei ancora molto, ma che importanza ha!! ti prego solo di farti trovare quando ritornerò quest'altra settimana, ricordati che mi faresti più male se non ti faresti trovare... *Carissima*... arrivederci a presto... anche se staremo lontani e divisi, un giorno ci potremo sempre rivedere... ." Letter from Giordano Rossini to Ester di Leonardi, August 18, 1960. Letter no. 353.

contexts, the findings of the analysis suggest that there were strong similarities between the emotional experiences of migrants and the loved ones they left behind.

Finally, the study also shows that the use of letters as tools of communication was not gender specific. As Lystra observes in her study of love letters, “both sexes energetically articulated their emotional ties with each other.”¹⁸² Indeed, in contrast to the classic image of the woman as the letter-writer *par excellence*, especially where the expression of love and other emotions was concerned, this study illustrates that men and women were equally articulate in reaching out to their loved ones and conveying emotions on paper. These findings bear out Gerber’s warning that, “there can be no easy generalizations about gender and the expression of emotions in immigrant epistolary.”¹⁸³

Conclusion

Emotions in letters of migration are heterogeneous, multi-faceted and complex. This analysis points to the finding that letters of Italian migrants and loved ones “whether the result of a long epistolary exchange or the beginning of it, reveal the energy that forges the links together.”¹⁸⁴ As this chapter illustrates, the letters exchanged between lovers and kin describe at an intimate level the letter-writers’ constant efforts to negotiate separation, whether temporary or permanent, and to build bridges across borders. The emotions in the letter also functioned as forces of agency, soul-sustaining and world-making to the correspondents involved. The emotions expressed in letters of migration were part of an

¹⁸² Lystra 20.

¹⁸³ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 121.

¹⁸⁴ Altman 61.

intense “epistolary conversation,” a “complicité”¹⁸⁵ shared between correspondents who wrote to each other to keep their connection alive.

Emotions in the letters exchanged between lovers, parents and children served a vital purpose, corresponding to the experience of two life-long friends described by David Gerber, as one of their “strongest ties to life.”¹⁸⁶ Indeed, in the context of postwar migration the letter served as the most important form of communication between migrants and loved ones, and was key to maintaining their emotional bonds.

Finally, letters emanated from and circulated in a world of their own, separate from the rationalities and realities experienced by letter-writers in their everyday lives. As Bruce Redford observes, the practise of letter-writing and letters themselves created “a distinctive world at once internally consistent, vital, and self-supporting.”¹⁸⁷ The paper on which letters were written was a unique space with its own language and silences. For instance, when Sara advised her husband that she was writing to him as the children were asleep, what she was saying in effect was that she had entered into another world which allowed her to reach into the depths of her soul and communicate her innermost *pensiero*.

¹⁸⁵ Willis 83.

¹⁸⁶ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives* 210.

¹⁸⁷ Redford 9.

Conclusion

This dissertation opens a window onto the multiple and divergent experiences of Italians whose lives were shaped by postwar migration to Canada. Through a detailed micro-analysis of personal correspondence exchanged between kin and lovers, this study has sought to demonstrate the enormous effects that migration had on the personal lives of migrants and their loved ones in the homeland. Although migration to Canada was motivated by hope and economic opportunity, the process of negotiating travel arrangements, adjusting to new conditions and coping with separation placed extraordinary demands on people. Although the nature of those demands and the means by which participants in the migration project attempted to meet them have been described to some degree by previous authors, the particular contribution of this thesis is that it gives voice to both the migrants themselves and to the family members who were left behind. The study analyses the nature and content of the private correspondence exchanged across the Atlantic over a period of three decades. Drawing on an original archive of letters that I created for the purposes of this thesis, I examine the impact of migration in its most personal realms. The thesis explores three main themes: the operations of kinship networks in the maintenance of social cohesion over time and across space; the differences in the experience of migration according to gender; and the emotional impact of migration felt by lovers and kin.

In this analysis I have endeavoured, as one scholar has recently observed, “to reach the past in its raw nature—one that grows from the complexity, confusion, and muddiness of everyday life, where human sentiments in all their varieties interact to produce events

that carry a story.”¹ At one level, the correspondence is especially revealing about the salience of kinship in the lives of postwar Italians and the multiple ways in which kinship networks were sustained through and because of migration. The flow of people back and forth across the Atlantic in the postwar period was also characterized by communication movements as news, advice and objects traveled along the “wire” of migration. Because the migration project was family-centered in its overall goals, kinship networks provided vital functions of support and attempted to exercise social control. The letters I examined are filled with advice and encouragement, reminders of social and gender roles, and warnings about duties and obligations, including the need to stay in touch, that had to be fulfilled.

Within the broad spectrum of kinship, however, the letters I examine clearly demonstrate that both the expectations and the experiences of migration were different for men and women. The authors of the correspondence inhabited a deeply gendered universe in postwar Italian society that made clear distinctions between the public and private, as well as the productive and reproductive spheres that were appropriate for men and women. As the ruptures caused by migration became increasingly evident to the actors in migration, gender norms and roles were invariably reified and reinforced as a defensive mechanism against change.

In some respects however, the most disruptive effect of migration was its impact on the emotions of migrants and loved ones who experienced the changes at first hand. In the current literature, scholars have illustrated the involvement of women and men facing complex realities of migration and negotiating them through individual, social and collective strategies, whether as migrants or loved ones who remained behind. My study

¹ Ramirez, “Clio in Words and in Motion” 999.

contributes to this scholarly trend, and advances it further through the analysis of romantic love letters in migration. The intensity with which the words of despair, love, frustration, and dreams were expressed in the letters forces us to appreciate traits of humanity that are rarely accessible to historical observation. Throughout the correspondence, I found unmistakable evidence of the letter-writers' desire to bridge the realities of separation and stay connected emotionally by writing of their affection and love for each other. By drawing from letters that were never intended for public consumption but were written instead from the hearts and minds of individuals wrestling with major life course events, this analysis throws light on the emotional intensity with which migration was felt. Because of the scale of Italian migration to Canada in the postwar period, it is often tempting to interpret the phenomenon from a macro perspective that focuses on the collective experiences of different cohorts. Without discounting the value of such studies, this thesis reminds us that migration was experienced by individuals and families, and that it had personal faces and individual voices.

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APPENDIX

A Sample Entry of the Database

Archivist	Colonello, Gianlorenzo
Address/Tel. no.	105 Bridge Ave., Montreal (tel. (514) 555-1345
Description of Doc.	White paper/1 sheet/ writing on 2 sides/6x11
Writing Details	Blue ink
Language	Italian
Date of Letter	09/07/1954
Place of Origin	Spilimbergo
Province/Country From	Pordenone, Italy
City/Town to	Natal
Prov./Country To	British Columbia, Canada
Writer's name (s)	Colonello, Luciano; Domenica, Marianna
No. Of Writers	Multiple
Writer's D.O.B.	a) 1900-1980 b) 1904-1992
Education	a) Grade V b) Grade III
Writer's Place of Birth	a) Spilimbergo b) Spilimbergo
Writer's Role in Migration Process	a) Stayed behind b) Stayed behind

Writer's Sex	Writer a) male Writer b) female
Letter Addressed to	Colonello, Gianlorenzo
Recipient's Name(s)	Colonello, Gianlorenzo
No. of Recipients	single
Relationships between Writers	Father—son; mother--son
Themes	<p>Writer a) father of migrant confirms receiving letter, and news on his health (having just been operated for hernia) and that in the next month, he'll be working. Everyone at home is well too. Very surprised to read that G.C. is no longer living with aunt/uncle in Michel; writer wonders if son, "forse gli ai mancato di rispetto verso loro." (writer in Italy worried that codes of behaviour in relationship between young man and older kin have been breached); writer ardently asks for clarification: "perche non ti spieghi piu bene, quando scrivi ai sempre cosi boco da dire?" (it seems that migrant-son in Canada is not writing frequently enough as family back home would like); writer tries to interpret/understand what happened : "perche a dirti cosi ancora che eri ammalato deve essere qualche cosa di grosso." Writer concludes by trying to reach out to son, "noi siamo tanto in pensiero per questo scrivi subito il motivo che noi abbiamo piacere a sapere. Saluti, tuo padre, Luciano.</p> <p>Writer b) mother of migrant writes that she is very sorry to read that he is no longer living with his aunt in Michel, and asks for clarifications in her letter with regards to possible changes in his relationship wt his aunt/uncle in B.C. In this part of the letter, she reiterates her expectations/understanding of how original living arrangements benefitted him (safe, comforting for him as cared for by caring family & to her as mother in Italy) that she believed he would stay in for his safety and well-being. Letter also shows a lot of empathy towards migrant son and his well-being. She also asks him to write back immediately; saluti "sono mamma" and in final note, she asks him: "quando scrivi scrivi tante novita"; saluti ai tuoi compagni o piacere che abbi trovato compagni." (receiving good news on son's friendships is a source of comfort for mother far away).</p>

Emphases	<p>Writer a) health and work/financial concerns for son-migrant who has changed living arrangements; that he is no longer living aunt/uncle he had originally agreed with his parents for reasons of protection, comfort, advice. Writer ardently wishes to hear more news about situation and reasons why. Writer b) very sorry to hear living arrangements have changed et that migrant-son is no longer living wt aunt/uncle; pleads for more info; asks him to keep well (especially now that he has just had surgery); sends saluti; and asks him to write "tante novita' e saluti to his new friends as she is happy he has found "buoni compagni"; wonders briefly why she has still not received news fm his aunt in B.C. (Michel).</p>
Discourses	<p>Health and well-being concerns; concerns over possible breaching of codes of behaviour by migrant son to elderly aunt and uncle; request to write more often and with more details; an effort on behalf of writers-parents to reach out to their migrant-son in understanding what happened, even though they feel in part, that the situation is out of their hands; dreams and expectations converge here: son's trip to Canada had been viewed wt more acceptance because. he had agreed that he would stay wt his aunt/uncle in Michel, B.C. Now that he has moved out of the security of his aunt/uncle's home, and parents come to know about this, they are left wondering how he will take care of himself, and they worry. They also worry about the kin network and how the ties they shared wt their family in Michel, have been affected by these new developments.</p>
Gender Norms and Relations	<p>As a result of their young migrant-son's departure fm the protective home of his aunt (also, his substitute mother) is a major concern for the letter-writers (parents) who are so far away; it's also taken for granted that the woman of the household (aunt) was preparing meals and taking care of him (nurture role): "cosa vuol dire che non ti a pure fatto da mangiare... credevo che ti tenesse con lei fino che rimanevi cola..."; concerned mother is also happy receiving news that he has found good "compagni" that serve as a positive influence and support to her young son: "o piacere che abbi trovato buoni compagni."</p>

Kinship and Social Networks	Letter-writers' concerns over the possible disruption of imp. Kinship network for migrant son who has moved out of his aunt/uncle's home as a result of a possible discussion or issue that is interpreted by writers' as potentially thorny for the son and for them who wish to maintain close ties wt family in B.C.; writers ask: "forse gli ai mancato di rispetto verso loro"; and immediately ask for a reply fm the son "subito risposta"; worries are magnified by the fact that they have not heard fm son's aunt in B.C. in some time (and they wonder why they may be) and hope for the best, with the words, "salutali tanto."
Labour and Related Networks	An e.g. from another letter in the collection: "Mother of migrant asks him if he can locate his cousin (her nephew) now that he has arrived in Montreal, and help him find a job because his family in Italy need his financial assistance: "guarda se puoi trovarle li lavoro io qui ti metto il suo indirizzo..."
Paesneria (Townsfolk Relations)	An e.g. from another letter in the collection: "Writers have acknowledged being advised that a friend of their son has visited Spilimbergo, and he has brought them gifts/money on son's behalf; Mother of migrant writes that she has accompanied young man to his family in nearby Casarsa."
Myths / Dreams	Expectations and dreams of going to America (Canada) converge as parents who remained behind expected their son to live in the same lodging arrangements they had originally approved of—conditions in which he would find good, home-cooked meals prepared for him by his aunt everyday. Young man had dreamed of coming to Canada and find work, and make solid earnings, and attain some "freedom" in the process. Had he stayed in Italy, migrant-participant feels that he would have earned far less, had an irregular job, and not have had the "freedom" he had in Canada, as he would have lived in the family household. (Interview and conversations with Gianlorenzo Colonello, 2005)
Emotional Expressions	Writer a) "perche non ti spieghi piu' bene, quando scrivi ai sempre cosi' poco da dire?"; "Noi siamo tanto in pensiero per questo scrivici subito il motivo che noi abbiamo piacere a sapere." Writer b) "ti prego darci subito risposta e scrivi il tutto, ti prego tieni bene non strapazze perche sei fresco dalla malattia.... Gianlorenzo quando scrivi scrivi tante novita'... baci cari e sono mamma."

Words	Writers' concern over possible breakdown in kinship relations as a result of son moving out suddenly of his aunt's home: "forse gli ai mancato di rispetto verso loro."
Expressions	An e.g. from another letter in the same collection: "sembra cento anni questo distacco noi parliamo sempre di voi" (time perceptions fluid and coping mechanism follows immediately)
Context	At the time of the letter, Gianlorenzo had moved to live temporarily with his cousins in Natal, B.C. and shortly after, he sold his car, and packed his bags and moved to Montreal where his uncle and family awaited him.
Particularities	Letter offers insight in familial concerns in change in living arrangements for son; evidence of concern over loss of respect for elder members of kin; some frustration over son's infrequent and short letters; happy about his friendships and good health.
Comments	Follow-up with participant on context leading to departure from Michel.
Copy format and file	cd-C olonello p62-63/71
Last updated	16/11/2005

A Letter from Each Letter-series

[illegible]

Yorrel River 12-7-50

Case may be

l'ora moglie
Dopo la tua ^{stima} ricorrenza lunedì scorso, alla quale
Tu ho risposto subito non ho più avuto tue notizie
non so perché, e spero non ti siano male, la
mia salute prosegue bene, con spero di morte sia per
per me con,

Torino a dire non so il perché non scrivi neanche una
lettera alla settimana, non sarà il tempo che ti manca,
anzi, è vero che avrai la preoccupazione continua di
guadagnare i piccioli in tutte le tue esigenze, ma con
un po' di sacrificio dovresti pensare che oltre a loro,
ne hai un altro picciolo, e da accudire e da curare,
dovrai pensare che nonostante la fortuna di essere qui
con i figli, non ha nessuna soddisfazione fuori di
quella, dunque ti prego, cerca se puoi, e se puoi, di
farne avere tue nuove più spesso, un accudito solo
di due righe, non importa come sonoritte, ma
saranno sufficienti per darmi coraggio, non che mi
incanti per questo, ma sai solo che tu mi dai, strano
bene, è abbastanza per tenermi sollevato il morale.
Invece io vado avanti male, vivo tutti i giorni con
la speranza di tornare dal lavoro e trovar qualcosa
di tuo, qualcosa che mi aiuti per che tempo sono qui,
qualcosa che mi tolga quest'ansia continua dal cuore.

Chiameremo per fotografare.

ad un momento li ho chiamati. Poi ho detto 123 960
ad un momento li ho chiamati. Poi ho detto 123 960
e proprio questa mattina io e i miei amici Torati. Dal Pozzo
che dove abbiamo trascorso tutta la giornata di ieri ed abbiamo
avuto una serie di incontri.

Torati bene di te e tutti abbiamo fatto delle cose che sembrava
di parlare con te. E ho anche visto del tuo scritto
e delle foto che hai fatto. Ho visto e di tutti i giorni
all'anno? di

perché ho visto, da dove voi che non ti manca niente e
che tutti ti vedono bene.

Carissima Pippa, nella tua precedente lettera mi dici che
hai tanta nostalgia, anch'io sento la stessa cosa per
te. Tanto di vero che spesso volte mi viene in mente di
farti un album per ricordare la tua vita e la nostra a
noi, perché per essere Torati è appena più di un
mese per me sembra un'ora un anno.

mi ha ricordato che sono volti tutti da sinistra,
cioè naturalmente mi ha capito che mi incanta. Ti parlo
in una tua prossima lettera di come se parli più precise notizie
differenzialmente, se insieme lo si non possiamo
anche essere tanto felici, perché allora da questa di essere
incompleta, non mi

Si può dire che la tua vita è molto più che non si sa
perché di mandare la tua lettera e non posso dirtela e
capitola l'occasione di poterla vedere. Per la
fatta di questi anni. Ora ci sono ancora tante
farei sapere? Questa volta non è un anno e non è un anno.

11/11/1958 - 85-1958
Commissione di F. G. S. e

Gi' faccio sapere che fra giorni arriverò a tua lettera.
Intesi che godi buona salute come per il presente segue il medico.
Di noi tutti. Ora ci fa sapere che tra a Montreal che lui a
mangiare da te tuo figlio. In questo modo contenti anni.
Se non ti conferiva in casa nel farsi in fatto lavoro casalingo
che con i finis d'ora lavoro tanto salutare solo la ditta
da cento soldi di parti qualche cosa addosso per i giorni e
di non andar dietro in macchina, e poi anche al malanni da essere
fuori a l'intero in terra straniera e sempre bello ad essere in soli
in tanta non ti pare. Perche' ti ricordi bene che quando sei partito
ai detto che non vii per parti qualche cosa per te ma invece
se non di tuo a tutto e a tutto fare, non conosci niente di bene
no per te? e poi sai anche qui un po' d'ora un po' di tempo
anchi, da bene che lavoro ancora una par l'ora che il lavoro qui
sanno poveri che ci sono più i disoccupati che quelli che lavorano.
Vedi anche G. che lavorava con la ditta Giacometti
e che era stato come tanti altri in un'altra industria, non è vero
invece di lavoro. Ci faccio sapere che fra qualche giorno
non solo la data di arrivo tanto di giorni in Canada che sarebbe
fine tuo viaggio. Figlio di tuo figlio. Dopo tutto
quello che lavorava come che stai a dimostrandoci e
che vengono in apparenza a Montreal per i nostri raprei
in dove sono destinati. Ma non teni questo la salute e l'armonia
nte salute della famiglia. Salute ai tuoi zii e nipoti.
A nome di noi tutti tuo padre.
Caro
sento contento che hai potuto prendere
subito il lavoro vero. Il buon Dio che non tenga sano
così la tua famiglia e con i suoi soldi più contenti e
perche' il lavoro del tuo mestiere mi salterebbe
otto. Al tuo figlio di. Barbara.
vieni pregato a fare un lavoro più pulito.