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## CRITICISM AND CRISIS CAPITALISM

THE FATE OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF GOLDMAN  
SACHS

“There is nothing more fabulous than us.”

—Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

“Mankind is not free to chose.”

—Joseph Schumpeter

IT CANNOT BE MERE COINCIDENCE that the covers of Joseph Pivato’s 1994 book of essays, *Echo*, and Anna Makolkin’s 2009 collection of essays, *Toronto—A City In Between*, are nearly identical.<sup>1</sup> Both feature an immaculate white border framing an architectural photograph of a domed, red-brick, classical building under a bright blue sky. *Echo*’s cover shows a Renaissance church in Rome; Makolkin’s book gives us Victorian Revival, the Cardinal Newman building (*circa* 1880) at the University of Toronto. Both are evidently threatened: Pivato’s decaying church, by age and neglect; and Makolkin’s leafy sanctuary, by the 1970s Brutal Style of the adjacent Robarts Library Tower she has so carefully included in the frame.

Pivato immigrated as a boy to Canada from Italy with his parents in 1952. He is a poet and professor of multicultural literature at Athabasca University in Alberta. Makolkin immigrated to Canada with her husband from Odessa, Ukraine, and in 1987 she became a professor of comparative literature at the University of Toronto, with thirteen published books on eclectic interests ranging from the semiotics of nationalism, humour in Somerset Maugham, to a eulogy for the late USSR. Just as Pivato goes outside the narrow confines of specialist literature to embrace Italian-Canadian filmmakers such as Paul Tana, Italian-Australian novelists like Rosa Cappiello, and ancient Italian folk music—music which has produced a literary theme

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Pivato, *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures* (Toronto: Guernica, 1994); Anna Makolkin, *Toronto: A City In Between* (Toronto: Anik Press, 2009). Page references within the text will appear in parentheses.

in emigrant songs of longing and *nostalgia*—so, too, Makolkin engages disparate examples from architecture, social history, and Canadian painting to position our multicultural literature within the context of a broader European tradition. Both critics argue, essentially, that ethnic writers in Canada—or, at least, *their* writers in Canada—are the heirs of a Classic heritage (with all that this loaded word entails), and their literary works are responses to the intransigent fact of immigrant loss.

Criticism “echoes,” revealing the source of the original. Hears, and echoes back, as Pivato describes his critical oeuvre, quoting the *Book of Samuel*: “Here I am in answer to a call.” The ethnic writer rediscovers his lost or forgotten culture on recognizing the failure of the host country to sustain its claims as a substitute, freer and happier, homeland. Pivato tells us about the moment of his own rediscovery, encountering a novel by Italian-Canadian Frank Paci, *The Italians*, in 1978.

Why did Paci’s novel, *The Italians*, produce a shock of recognition in me and in many other readers of ethnic background? The reasons are obvious but paradoxically difficult to articulate. But why am I shocked and delighted at the same time? Italians began to come to Canada as immigrants at the turn of the century. For decades they have been silent, almost invisible. Suddenly I hear a voice, our voice. (*Echo*, 88)

This silence, as Makolkin reckons it, is part of the unholy bargain immigrants made with the all-powerful national interests on their arrival. She quotes “America,” a poem by Pier Di Cicco, written after his first trip to Italy in 1973 had awakened him to the glories of the past, an illumination that also revealed the spiritual barrenness of North America and its wanton appetite for our souls:

That night I honeymooned with America,  
She took me around like a sweetheart,  
Showing off her home town.  
We came upon places where Miller had her  
Before me. We stopped off at depots and  
She was friendly with old drunks, with sailors.  
She has nothing to sing about, the night  
She lifted her dress for me.  
But quietly for all over the world. (*Toronto*, 197)

Pivato, quoting another poem by Di Cicco, *Donna italiano*, describes it as a love poem addressed to Italia as the romantic object; and then, in his driest voice, adds tellingly: “I cannot imagine someone writing a love poem to Canada with such intimacy” (78).

The two critics identify a quartet of themes common to Canada’s ethnic writers: Silence, Distancing, the False Self, and, most importantly in this writer’s judgment, the Supremacy of Difference. Joining forces with Arun Mukherjee, Pivato insists that ethnic literature stoutly opposes a nationalist agenda that seeks to universalize human drama and expunge all subjective experience in the interests of civic docility and preservation of the status quo. He concludes:

The majority English-speaking communities have tried to identify a common national tradition, to arrive at a common national identity ... the literatures of other minority groups in Canada must be read in the context of cultural difference, social change and political reform. (44)

I will examine these four themes in the work of the two critics, both in terms of how they inform their individual criticism, and how they evoke dialogue within the wider literary community. But first a brief examination of today’s world, and the question of how this new World itself appears in their criticism.

#### LOST INNOCENCE IN THE AGE OF GOLDMAN SACHS

Born in Dublin in 1961, Margaret Mazzantini is the author of the 2002 novel, *Non ti muovere*, made into a film starring Penelope Cruz and directed by Mazzantini’s husband, Sergio Castellitto. Set in Rome, the male protagonist (played by Castellitto) is a doctor married to a contemporary professional woman (sleek dyed hair, tailored suit, laptop). He has been having an affair with Italia, a passionate, earthy Albanian immigrant (Cruz), a skinnier but still voluptuous version of Sophia Loren in *Two Women*. They eat the simple food she prepares, make love, talk intimately in a dark, rude and isolated flat that might well be Etruscan or medieval: the rural heaven of our timeless past.

Well, there you are, two women, one man. The doctor fails to save Italia from a botched abortion of their child, and she dies in a pool of blood; but a third woman, the doctor’s teenaged daughter, suffers a motorcycle accident with her Goth boyfriend, and comes out of her coma—thanks to the spiritual intercession of the deceased Italia.

Although written by a fearless woman, the work has been criticized as a paean to Italy's paternalistic society. Castellitto's freewheeling character has it all: a presentable wife and a sexy mistress, a smart condo and sporty car to boot. But of course he doesn't. Patently, Italia is already dead when the film begins. She is just his memory, pure nostalgia; and what we are witnessing is the hero's reconciliation to his final loss of a life rooted in instinct, and his uneasy compromise with the rationalized new world order. The doctor did not leave his wife for Italia because he discovered that his wife was pregnant with their baby—the girl in the coma—the yet un-lived daughter whom no technique in this world can save. The only future she has must be bought at a price—paid for with the sacrificial blood of the Sundered Past. The otherness of the lost Italia is reconciled in the character of the daughter's boyfriend, a young street-hipster who is both anonymously international in style and utterly opaque in his primitive, neo-tribal persona. Men wept openly in the Italian theatres when this film was shown in 2004; it was a eulogy for the entire country.

Pivato alludes to this breach in history, the profound rupture of globalization. There is firstly the irreversible fact of emigration itself, a descent into the enforced silence of a foreign and not entirely welcoming land:

Many [Italian-Canadian newspapers] were destroyed because of the Canadian Government War measures against Italians in Canada and the internment of 700 Italian men from September, 1939, until 1942. (65)

He makes his point against Clifford Sifton's famous observation of 1922 as Minister of the Interior, that some immigrants were deemed more desirable than others because they fit the National Dream of breaking the Prairies:

I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forebears have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality. (152)

The first wave of Italians came as migrant workers, and Pivato is careful to distinguish his forebears' unique history from other immigrants' narratives, quoting another expansionist government official on the benefits of importing docile Italian recruits:

Practically all are engaged as navies. In every city you see them digging drains. The Italian is a good navy. He obeys the orders of the boss. (134)

Makolkin reminds us Ukrainian-Canadians were also interned, during the Great War: *The Orc* took them all, indifferently (190). Yes, Canada treated its immigrant groups as different machines for different jobs, reducing whole societies to technical castes—that’s the brute fact of industrialization. But there is a second and more pervasive rupture, the fact of Modernity’s shocking arrival in the second half of the twentieth century as a worldwide and essentially random phenomenon of permanent dislocation, collective anxiety, and affective cultural loss. Pivato quotes John Berger (“Emigration, the quintessential experience of our time”) to introduce the theme of the broken family (148), a ritualized social death which ends in *The Promised Land*, “where the manipulation of the illusion is more important than the reality” (176).

Welcome to Canada Ltd., or America, Inc.—take your pick. Is it also *Italy*, today? Has the ancient soft green homeland become falsified, reified, commodified? Certainly, international banking has relentlessly destabilized Makolkin’s ex-Soviet homeland, once part of the European tradition of high culture with ancient cities like Odessa and Lviv nurturing generations of international painters, musicians, and architects into the 1920s (96). Five years after its so-called Orange Revolution, Ukraine is now a bankrupt kleptocracy, reeling from financial crisis to crisis, part of the Eastern margins collapsing in likely anticipation of the G7 center’s own imminent, trillion-dollar collapse.

In answer to this dangerous predicament, Makolkin calls to action a new generation of Canadian artist-heroes, enlisting Nino Ricci, Pier De Cicco, Gloria Kupchenko-Frolick, William Kurelek, and Natalka Hussar among the new defenders, men and women who “speak from the centre ... pushing Canada away from a vulgarized multiculturalism, away from immigrant nostalgia.” Their task is to restore the bridge to the ancient celebration of life (226). Pivato calls the Italian immigrant process anachronistic, disconnected from the “standard Italian” culture—where “media and Americanization have gradually destroyed the folk culture,” adding Italia to an anomalous post-industrial Europe where everything is uniform, centralized, indistinct (67). But Makolkin goes further, identifying specific individuals who have aggressively promoted tenets of Modernism, such as Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944), the Futurist pamphleteer and provocateur who welcomed

total war as the true hygiene, and got what he wished for with Mussolini in Ethiopia. In Canada his iconoclastic role was played by architect John Lyle, who by 1907 was calling for raw wilderness to replace European tradition as the sole source of our artistic renewal (207). What interests Makolkin is the possibility of cultural immunity, the strategies of resistance employed by still-intact communities to counter these radicals eager to toss it all into the flames, in the holy name of the Future.

Today, however, it has become increasingly difficult to name the perpetrators and identify the partisans in the current phase of our ongoing economic conflagration. Power's transmutation into a boundary-less fiction with long and retractable claws eludes both governments and investigative journalists. What is there to say about the passage of its hurricane winds through the postwar decades, except to survey the wreckage left behind? An article published in mid-2009 reminds us that this ill wind is invisible:

Any attempt to construct a narrative around all the former Goldmanites in influential positions quickly becomes an absurd and pointless exercise, like trying to make a list of everything. What you need to know is the big picture: If America is circling the drain, Goldman Sachs has found a way to be that drain—an extremely unfortunate loophole in the system of Western democratic capitalism, which never foresaw that in a society governed passively by free markets and free elections, organized greed always defeats disorganized democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Matt Taibbi's report for *Rolling Stone* was published in July 2009; his admission that contemporary history defies coherent analysis is echoed by financial reporter Bethany McLean, in a piece for *Vanity Fair*:

Despite the public financial statements Goldman files every quarter, no outsider can tell how the firm really makes its money. You cannot see into "the black box" of the trading empire. (CEO) Blankfein says that only about 10 percent of Goldman's profits come from purely proprietary trades, but there is no way any outsider can confirm that independently.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Taibbi, "The Great American Bubble Machine," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, July 9, 2009, 1082.

<sup>3</sup> Bethany McLean, "The Bank Job," *Vanity Fair*, January 2010, 3.

Taibbi claims Goldman Sachs has engineered every major market manipulation since the Great Depression, that it manufactures speculative bubbles and profits hugely from them:

The formula is relatively simple: Goldman positions itself in the middle of a speculative bubble, selling investments they know are crap. Then they Hoover up vast sums from the middle and lower floors of society with the aid of a crippled and corrupt state that allows it to rewrite the rules in exchange for the relative pennies the bank throws at political patronage. (1082)

All this seems cinematic if not apocalyptic, an exercise in twenty-first-century millenarianism, in which the imminent arrival of the Horned Antichrist is replaced by the specter of Crisis Capitalism, as international bankers take on bigger and bigger targets:

The vast and unruly credit-default-swap market is facing renewed scrutiny as U.S. authorities probe the role Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street banks may be playing in pushing Greece toward financial collapse.

“Using these instruments in a way that intentionally destabilizes a company or a country is counterproductive,” Mr. Bernanke (U.S. Federal Reserve Board Chairman) told members of the Senate banking committee.<sup>4</sup>

The twentieth century witnessed the depopulation and mass dislocation of whole communities from native forestlands and agricultural regions, forcefully evacuated for power dams and other mega-projects, and from once-proud cities ruined by modern warfare. Now we are witnessing a new kind of refugee, the *economic* refugee, whose impoverished homeland can no longer sustain ordinary civic life in the face of mass movements of this international *blitzkrieg* capital. The collapse of local markets and national purchasing power, and the unceremonious dumping of unwanted manufacturing overruns on struggling states that can ill-afford the drowning of nascent local industries, are but side effects of a new kind of Viking economic raid for which we lack both hard data and a proper terminology. To call it colonial—neo- or otherwise—misses the point: There is no *relationship*,

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<sup>4</sup> Barrie McKenna and Joanna Slater, “Role of Banks Eyed in Greek Debt Crisis,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 26, 2010, B1.

sought or gained here, only the fact of a crushing appropriation at the point of a trillion-dollar gun. As the influential economist of disaster capitalism Joseph Schumpeter wrote in 1942:

Things economic and social move by their own momentum and ... compel individuals and groups to behave in certain ways whatever they may wish to—not indeed by destroying their freedom of choice but by shaping the choosing mentalities and narrowing the list of possibilities ... In consequence, capitalist performance is not even relevant for prognosis.<sup>5</sup>

So what is the job of the artist in the twenty-first century? To stay innocent of the material conditions of life? Or to get his or her hands dirty? It is not enough to be the innocent victim of swap derivatives and arbitrated futures. Where is our Dante, Seer of the Modern Inferno?

#### SILENCE AS STRATEGY OF SURVIVAL

Pivato and Makolkin identify various forms of silence as a key strategy in the survival kit of the newcomer. Pivato quotes Italian-Canadian poet Pier Di Cicco with a familiar justification for an early form (1978) of collective silence:

However pluralistic the landscape seemed to sociologists, the sheer force of Canadianism had been enough to intimidate all but the older “unofficial-language” writers. (31)

Pivato does not offer a detailed description of what this *sheer force of Canadianism* might be, exactly. In an essay published twenty years later he states that while he is well aware of the dangers of biological determinism, he is equally sensitive to the power relations in the major languages and “literatures that also belong to and were used as instruments by colonial powers.”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to argue that while the “idea of authentic voice is dismissed by some of my colleagues as naïve,” other writers as disparate as French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Canadian literary critic Sneja Gunew and Italian-Canadian author Mary di Michele, all agree on a form of inner essentialism:

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Can Capitalism Survive? Creative Destruction and the Failure of the Global Economy* (1944; repr., New York: Harper, 2009) 132.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Pivato, “Representation of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction,” in *Literary Pluralities*, ed. Christl Verduyn (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998) 153.



The unconscious is structured like a language ... The quotation from Mary di Michele at the beginning of this essay is an example of the inscription of the original language in the body. During her first return trip to Italy ... Mary di Michele began to dream in Italian once more as she must have done as a little girl. (153)

Makolkin also cites the protective, nurturing uses of immigrant silence:

Author Jessie Middleton described [1934] the contribution of the new immigrants ... as conforming to the spirit of the place ... attributing the conformity to their own passivity, as if they had the freedom to act otherwise. The new immigrant waves carried their own memories—the nostalgia for Byzantine art ... The promise of freedom in the New World materialized solely in the realm of religious freedom, leaving the political and cultural mainstream solid and impenetrable. (73)

This analysis, of course, begs the question of whether Canada today is the seamless stone wall it once was, a relatively isolated colonial backwater with the fading picture of a gelid Queen in every corner post office. That blue satin sash, those spectral white diamonds! The calculated high violence to our souls! Are we talking about an applied technology of Social Awe and Engineering Precision? That perfect marriage of industry and fate every schoolchild witnessed in the large Neilson's Chocolate map of the Pink Dominion hanging over the blackboard? The sheer force of iconic Canadianism cannot account for the different forms of silence that ethnic writers now take up.

At thirty-seven, the poet Di Cicco entered a monastery north of Aurora, Ontario. A recent collection of his poems locates him between the shopping mall and a private heaven:

I dreamt I was lost in wal-mart.  
Things are almost the same.

I dreamt God gave me fifty thousand years  
to become holy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, *The Dark Time of Angels* (Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2003) 68.

In the hundred years since the publication of Rilke's *New Poems*, angels have come and gone; the place they like to visit is the silence of the meditative heart, the deep silence within humanity's fifty thousand years of struggle on earth. All writers need this true silence, a genuine retreat, to hear their authentic inner voice against the din of a material world, this harrowing no-place where almost-the-same-things proliferate and threaten us with psychic dissolution. Can we yet claim Di Cicco as a "Canadian" poet? Hasn't he *grown up*?

Makolkin describes another kind of silence as cultural amnesia: "the artificial euphoria" of Modernism's detachment from history (209). Her early literary heroes include the itinerant Ukrainian writer Petro Karman'sky (1878–1956), who briefly witnessed the travails of his fellow settlers *in situ* and wrote a poem on the eve of his departure, "Farewell to Canada," which anticipates Di Cicco's "America" by almost a century:

O Canada—a courtesan, cunning and corrupt,  
How many have you tricked to your non-existing paradise?  
... You've cut my heart in two. (135)

But it is the American-Ukrainian novelist Vladimir Korolenko (1853–1921), author of *Bez yazyka* (*Tongueless*), who receives Makolkin's special acclaim as a master of Swiftian political analysis:

Everything in this country is upside down; a man invents machine needed. And a machine invents, or better say, creates a required machine user. One has to invent a machine that requires a Free human being. (137)

Pivato cites the migrant culture of voicelessness as giving rise to new forms of consciousness—if consciousness is the right word. Perhaps it is new forms of *meaning*. Just as the suddenly-blind find new truths in their remaining and now-heightened senses, so, too, these silenced immigrants discover a new truth hidden from ordinary perception. Italian-Canadian works have explored the world from the standpoint of a paralysed quadriplegic, an invisible person, a woman whose body belongs to everyone but herself, people who can't speak *any* language properly at all, a whole culture of enforced and avowed silence. Is this tragedy? Or a new beginning?

## DISTANCING, SOCIAL AND AESTHETIC

Pivato recognizes *distancing* as another strategy in coming to terms with the fact of immigrant experience. Distancing takes over where silence leaves off:

They challenge the faceless history of the textbook with identifiable voices ... reversing the ethnic minority position from one of silence to one of articulating a particular view point. (32)

He quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on the need of writers to choose between *speaking as* and *speaking*:

The question of “speaking as” involves a distancing from oneself. But when ... the dominant people talk about listening to someone “speaking as” something or other, I think *there* one encounters a problem. They cover over the fact of the ignorance they are allowed to possess. (209)

This studied ignorance Spivak describes is a kind of official badge of power, a token of rectitude that is as much *aesthetic* as it is sociological or political. In an influential essay published in 1912, critic Edward Bullough analysed “aesthetic consciousness” as the apperception of Distance emanating from the very object of contemplation:

[Distance] is obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one’s own self. It describes a personal relation ... held in abeyance. Loss of distance, under-distancing [results] in work that is ‘crudely naturalistic,’ ‘repulsive in its realism.’ An excess of distance produces the impression of improbability, artificiality.”<sup>8</sup>

The idea that ordinary working people out in Canada’s streets might be similarly regarded as mere “aesthetic objects” by the lorgnette-holders has, of course, occurred to writers like Nino Ricci, whom Makolkin honours for his repeated warnings about this “post-nomadic phase of human history,” where the mass resettlement of peoples serves the incessant production needs of global capitalism:

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 88.

There is no price tag which could be put on the loss of culture. Though his message speaks to all, it is of a particular value to Italians, and [Ricci] makes no apology for that. After all, Italians, born into the mother of Europe, found in Canada more than a humble role. The descendants of the urban Rome became servants to the rural wasteland. (193)

Rising to new heights of profound insight, Makolkin's critique of Canada's role in creating *a society of distance* has two poles. One is its cult of rurality, "the core of the modernist philosophy," with the emphasis on an unthinking retreat into anti-urbanism and the implacable devaluation of civic history (209). She takes, for example, serious issue with curator Joan Murray's assessment of the work of Ukrainian-Canadian painter William Kurelek, as merely "anecdotal and sturdily representational," insisting that his iconic work is political, subversive and revolutionary (143–44). Murray's misreading is undoubtedly intentional, squelching, "Big Nurse managerial"; it serves to de-fang an idiosyncratic art that is troublesome, that raises too many questions, that threatens the *status quo* on which the government salaries of curators and other bureaucratic functionaries depend.

The other pole is the famous unease of Canadians (apart from the Québécois) with city living: Torontonians are "provincial, rural and undemanding, satisfied with folk dancing"—and, let us add, weekly hockey games (147). Standing beside the New City Hall designed by Finnish architect Viljo Rewell, the residents, wholly unaccustomed to smart city life, have "no idea what to do there." The reception of Moore's *Archer* tells us everything we need to know about life west of Montreal. Like the chamber of plastic balls in Ikea, the skating rink out front offers some mindless, small-town diversion to those who really need it.

What these immigrant writers are telling us, according to both critics, is that there *is* a Canadian identity, but one that is not exactly what the self-congratulatory stories on the Vancouver Olympics or the deer-in-the-headlights paid guests on CBC's *The Hour* insist on telling us. It is not founded on the rich legacy of the Anglo-Saxons who were here third, if not first. It is not a core, meta-British ethnicity, the carefully constructed *White Civility* of Daniel Coleman's provocative essay, a *primus inter pares* tea-and-cakes culture, provincial or otherwise. On the contrary, it is composed of all those people of whatever background who give up their culture in exchange for the dubious rewards of enlisting in the Modernist juggernaut, a faceless army of studied indifference and rootless mimicry, which took swift possession

of Canada's soul during the Depression.<sup>9</sup> It is composed of those people who are paid to not recognize the rest of us.

The danger lies in enlisting in this vanguard of grey cheerleaders.

#### THE FALSE SELF

Perhaps it is not the shibboleth Other we should concern ourselves with, but the *Nemo*, the self-declared No One of the Modernist agenda, whose twin hallmarks are utter self-abnegation and a willingness to carry out the mandate of his or her superiors no matter what. We should not confuse the antidote to this phenomenon with mere literacy alone. Italians only had Mussolini for twenty years. Ukrainian-Canadians, with their seven decades' experience of totalitarianism—the mass piety towards abstract Labour, the Stalinist show trials, the signed confessions of avowed Communists who prove their service to the Party by abject admissions to every treason imaginable, a shoe-banging Khrushchev—have a word for these selfless cadres of Reason: *nykulturny*, no culture. As Jacques Ellul argues:

People used to think that reading evidenced human progress... that reading is the road to freedom. The important thing is not to be able to read, but to understand what one reads, to reflect on and judge what one reads. Outside of that, reading has no meaning (and even destroys certain qualities of memory and observation) ... Lenin insisted on the necessity of teaching reading: the school became the place to prepare students to receive propaganda.<sup>10</sup>

It is the spilt between the older and younger generations that occupies writers of Pivato's community, a sense of ongoing betrayal that, he says, quoting poet Mary di Michele, signals the need for a new accommodation between the old world and the new:

Your north american education  
Has taught you how to kill a father,  
but you are walking down an Italian  
way, so you will surrender  
and visit him in the hospital

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<sup>9</sup> Coleman makes this argument in his forthcoming book, *Look Natural: The Life and Times of a Model Canadian Family*.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973) 108.

where you will be accused  
 of wishing his death  
 in wanting a life  
 for yourself. (82)

Marshall McLuhan said Ellul shows us whenever a new technology encompasses any culture or society, *the sheer result* is propaganda.<sup>11</sup> Propaganda is a separate reality, *itself* constituting the exigent new culture. The “educated” are deliberately taught to read it and nothing else, certainly not past scripts with their varying accounts of social truth. Propaganda asks us to be false to the past, and it works by suborning our witness.

In Makolkin’s view this near-automatic process of disengagement and self-assertion can lead to disaster, to untold human suffering. Her discussion of the work of Alberta-born writer Gloria Kupchenko-Frolick establishes the parameters of the inner conflict, a body of work that shows that author torn *three* ways: “between historic loyalty to the [immigrant] group, the personal freedom-seeking Canadian identity and her preference for European culture.” In this fateful triangular struggle it is easy to make the wrong choice, to become false to one’s true self, to end “confused, betrayed, and unfulfilled.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, paradoxically, we *know* there is an authentic, unrealized self to be achieved, precisely because Canada, this empty “House of Tears,” so utterly fails to contain the poet’s deepest longing and restless private vision—despite all one’s bargaining with the new land:

Ivan Babich wants to confess, but his angel chickens do not listen. The black rooster crows frenziedly, coyotes howl in the startling silent prairie.<sup>13</sup>

It is the insistence on the supremacy of difference that marks the success of a writer’s vision.

#### THE SUPREMACY OF DIFFERENCE

It is, of course, open to the Canadian writer to assert any identity he or she chooses. There is choice, there is latitude, and there is license. Some, as

<sup>11</sup> Marshall McLuhan, review of *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, by Jacques Ellul, 1973, *Book Week* (as quoted on back cover of *Propaganda*).

<sup>12</sup> Rostyslav Bratun, as quoted in Makolkin, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Frolick-Kupchenko, *The Chicken Man*, as quoted in Makolkin, 151.

Pivato notes, *achieve* distance, *refusing* nostalgia (80). Some, like Frederick Philip Grove and Archey Belaney (“Gray Owl”) find a marketable fiction to refashion themselves whole. Whether these self-declaratory works find an audience, whether such works have any meaning to *the rest of us*, is an issue Pivato raises without making full answer. He does not examine the literature’s material limitations: the sociology of the publishing industry in Canada, the system of grants and arts funding administered by various government agencies, the impact of officially-mandated taste, the vexing issue of a bureaucratic multicultural ideology that definitely if silently prefers and promotes some kinds of public work over others. Well, this writer could tell a thousand stories about the unrevealed but decidedly concrete and *political*, Canadian literary landscape, which shapes, at the very minimum, which work gets published and what languishes in the writer’s desk for posterity to revive.

If it is difficult to be a writer in this transparently small pond, it is even more difficult to be a critic. One is undoubtedly constrained to mention without hint of colouration every writer, no matter how obscure, or face the inevitable repercussions at some future arts conference!

Pivato views multicultural literature as doubly marginal of necessity; if mainstream Canadian literature is already marginal, its multicultural works occupy a distant periphery, perhaps within the final Oort cloud of pure individualization. The only centre in this tangential superstructure is the author himself, alive to his or her aberrant condition. Hers is a long and lonely orbit, with only such occasional blazing comets as one might meet for company. Is there a universal to be found in this distanced experience? Is it not, like the postulated but unobservable Oort cloud itself, comprised mostly of nuance and errant possibility? One idea finding ready purchase today is that the increasing alienation of global society brings marginal writers to the fore; more than ever, their struggle to assert an artistic difference against the tides of an oceanic media echoes the struggle of uprooted people everywhere.

The daily headlines remind us that there is no mainstream culture left intact, no refuge safe from the siege engines of a depersonalized, rapacious economy. Pivato sees his community as the far-flung children of Rome, always ready to come home. Makolkin finds solace in the living idea of the City Eternal, the community of artists who band together to bridge their past to an imagined future, celebrating their handiwork with their spiritual ancestors proudly in attendance. Somewhere there is a home for us all.