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Literature and the migration experience: twenty-one years of Italo-Australian narrative (1965-1986)

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LITERATURE AND THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE
TWENTY-ONE YEARS OF ITALO-AUSTRALIAN NARRATIVE
(1965-1986)

A thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Gaetano Luigi Rando

BA *Syd*, MA *W.Aust*, DipPerfStorLing It *Rome*

Department of Languages
1988

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Rita, son Felice and daughter Giuliana for the support, patience and forbearance over the years it has taken to prepare this work.

Thanks and acknowledgements are due to the supervisors Professor Barry Leal and Dr Daniel Hawley for their encouragement, detailed constructive criticism and much valuable advice. Any residual errors are entirely my own. To the writers who most generously gave of their time and freely supplied difficult to obtain / unpublished materials. Without their work this study would never have been written.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted for at any other institution for

Department of Languages
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8 September 1989

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to examine how Italian immigrants to Australia have described their experience through the medium of narrative literature. It is the first detailed study of its type and as such it seeks to lay the foundation for further more specific studies. It examines some thirty-five narrative texts, both published and unpublished, comprising novels and collections of short stories plus a number of individual short stories written by some 27 writers over a twenty-one year period (1965-1986), a period which coincides with the most intensive activity in Italo-Australian narrative writing to date.

The first chapter deals with pertinent theoretical and social issues, presents a survey of previous studies on Italian "migrant" literatures in English-speaking countries and provides a brief overview of aspects of "Italo-Australian" literature which are not dealt with in the main body of the thesis. Chapters 2-9 deal with individual authors and works. An analysis appropriate to this stage in the development of the subject is employed which involves an approach combining authors and themes. This approach has been adopted since certain authors are seen as identified with certain sets of major themes. Some overlap has inevitably occurred and this has been appropriately cross-referenced in the relevant chapters.

The conclusion explores the theoretical, sociological and literary implications of the texts examined. Although it is problematical to classify a number of the texts as "literature" in terms of the qualitative criteria generally applied, there is no doubt of their value as sociological documents presenting a view of Australia and of Australian society which is unique. "Italo-Australian narrative", as defined by the present study, is characterised by themes linked to the migrant experience although there are some exceptions to this general pattern. The writers are in the main first generation immigrants who relate their feelings for and reactions to the new environment and their attitudes towards their place of origin.

The thesis is complemented by a comprehensive bibliography of the works consulted and referred to as well as four appendices which lie outside the area of the defined topic but which are relevant to it insofar as they deal with some of the broader issues related to Italian "migrant" literature.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1:	INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND ELEMENTS	1
Chapter 2:	NARRATIVE AS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE - PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS NARRATIVE	50
Chapter 3:	GHETTO OR STEPPING-STONE: THE ITALO- AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY AS A THEME IN ITALO-AUSTRALIAN NARRATIVE	98
Chapter 4:	AUSTRALIA REVISITED: GINO NIBBI'S <i>COCKTAILS D'AUSTRALIA</i>	150
Chapter 5:	ROSA CAPPIELLO AND THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF THE SINGLE WOMAN	189
Chapter 6:	THE BUSH AND THE OUTBACK AS THEMES IN ITALO-AUSTRALIAN NARRATIVE	237
Chapter 7:	"MULTICULTURALISM" AS A THEME IN ITALO-AUSTRALIAN NARRATIVE	268
Chapter 8:	ITALY REMEMBERED, ITALY IMAGINED, ITALY REVISITED	293
Chapter 9:	OTHER WRITERS, OTHER THEMES	332
CONCLUSION		367
BIBLIOGRAPHY		393
APPENDICES		
Appendix I:	DIALECT AND LANGUAGE IN ITALO-AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE	418
Appendix II:	THE MIGRATION THEMES IN THE MAINSTREAM LITERATURES (ITALIAN AND AUSTRALIAN)	431
Appendix III:	RENATO AMATO: AN IMMIGRANT WRITER IN NEW ZEALAND	454
Appendix IV:	ON ITALIAN CANADIAN LITERATURE	465
