

I was a juror for the Writer's Guild of Alberta's

*Finding Rosa: A Mother with Alzheimer's, a
Daughter in Search of the Past*

Caterina Edwards and I have long shared a similar project: to write narratives about lost or suppressed history which nevertheless is entwined with our lives. In Caterina's case, I am speaking of her new book, , a project realized after years of toil and turmoil, of vision and re-vision.

In a sense, I feel that I was there at the beginning or near the beginning, for I recall a walk in the country with Caterina one hot summer day when we were both on retreat at Strawberry Creek Lodge near Devon, and her admission to me about the trouble she was having with her material, how to organize it, even what it was about.

I remember this conversation because, in the first place, I knew Caterina as a novelist and writer of short stories, but this new project, she disclosed, was going to be *creative nonfiction*. In the second place, it was about a journey she had just started on, to the tangled roots of her Italian mother's origins and she really didn't know where she was headed or whether anyone would care much once she got there. (That awful question that writers are always confronted with: *Who cares? So what?*)

In Caterina's case, the question also came bedevilled by the fact that she traced her mother's story back from Italy to Istria, that is to say to Yugoslavia, that is to "Eastern Europe," Communist and Slavic. *Who cares?* And here too I shared her trepidation: I too was writing narratives about Slavs and Communists and the Balkans, and knew first-hand how indifferent at best and how hostile at worst the Canadian reading and publishing worlds are to the very term "Balkan." (I once taught a writing class in which students believed the Balkans were "small islands off the coast of Argentina.")

And, alongside this adventure, Caterina was also living with a mother descending into the madness of Alzheimer's, her mind quite beyond the reach of Caterina's enquiries.

The result of that two-fold journey is *Finding Rosa*. It is a work of what we now call creative nonfiction (I'm not sure what we used to call it), which is a genre most succinctly described as the felicitous combination of documentary materials and literary techniques. Caterina's experience as a writer of fiction has stood her in good stead in this genre new for her, for she deploys such fictional devices as plot construction, dialogue, shifting points of view, characterization and wholly-imagined scenes - but at all times at the service of her diligent enquiry into history and memory.

The fact that she narrates these materials in the first person enriches them with her disarming, sometimes alarming, openness: the book is at once intimate and public.

Caterina Edwards is the author of works of fiction, *The Lion's Mouth* (which appeared in French translation in 1999 as *La Gueule du lion*) *Whiter Shade of Pale*, *Becoming Emma*, and *Island of the Nightingales*. **Numerous of her stories have appeared in collections such as**

Going Some Place: Anthology of Creative Non-Fiction

and

She has written plays, most

recently a radio drama for CBC, "The Great Antonio." She tells me that she has been writing more and more nonfiction. "Assimilation," in *Alberta Views*, "Virtual Italian Storia," and "Walking the Line," in *Legacy*. **She is a frequent presenter at conferences, for example:** "From Sea to C Minus," *Memoria e Sogno: Quale Canada Domani?* Venice. And "Where the Heart Is," *Palinsesti Culturali: Gli apporti delle immigrazioni alla letteratura del Canada*, Udine.