

Book recalls pain of Italian-Canadians interned during war

By Burt Heward
Citizen books editor

Antonio Mazza hopes to end the silence about Canada's internment of Italian-Canadians during the Second World War.

The award-winning author-translator has just produced an English version of a French-language chronicle by Montreal journalist Mario Duliani, who was one of several hundred Italian-Canadians interned in Petawawa and Fredericton, N.B.

Duliani's book, *The City Without Women*, was first published in 1945 and it is the only first-hand account of life for Italian-Canadians in the camps.

Mazza, whose family settled in Ottawa when he was a boy, argues passionately that Duliani's story must be known, to show Canadians how unjustly they treated their citizens in the past and to demonstrate the inadequacy of prime minister Brian Mulroney's 1990 official apology to 700 Italian-Canadians.

Most of them were picked up at home by the RCMP, but Duliani read about the government order and did his duty by going to the Mounties in Montreal, who arrested him in June 1940.

His book describes the RCMP prison in Montreal, then the transfer to Petawawa where, after trying forest labor and other work he was too weak to survive, he was assigned to the prisoners' hospital. There, at least, he had a decent bed and a light at night by which to write.

When the Petawawa camps shut down, Duliani was transferred with the others to Fredericton, where he fought flies and mosquitoes while living in a tent for the fall, then found himself crammed into overcrowded barracks and forced to eat German food, because the German prisoners did the cooking.

In all, Duliani spent 40 months in the camps.

Prize-winning translator

Antonino Mazza's English translation of Duliani's memoir has just been published by Mosaic Press in a \$14.95 paperback. It's not the first translation the 45-year-old has tackled: in 1991, Mazza won the 1992 Italo Calvino Prize from Columbia University for his translation, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Poetry*.

Born in Calabria, Italy, Mazza, came to Canada with his family in 1961. After studies at Carleton University, and in Pisa, Italy, and the University of Toronto, he taught at the University of Ottawa and Queen's University.

Post-war Italian immigrants found little support from the Italian-Canadian community because it

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— Award-winning author

had been shattered by the RCMP enforcement of the War Measures Act, Mazza says.

"Everything had been dismantled," Mazza says. "One day, they were free. The next day, this apocalypse happened, which many never lived to expiate." Only 75 ex-internees were still living when Mulroney apologized.

While only 619 men and 13 women were designated for internment, about 30,000 of the 112,625 Italian-Canadians were branded as "enemy aliens" following the June 10, 1940, application of the War Measures Act against them. Yet half of the Italian-Canadians had been born in Canada and 41,942 of the rest had become Canadian citizens.

In contrast, the United States briefly interned only 200 of its two million Italian-Americans, Mazza says.

Seventeen ethnic groups were interned at the Petawawa camp. Among the 12 physicians there, 10 were Italian. "It was a sign of wanting to decapitate the community, make it powerless," Mazza says bitterly.

Most who suffered through internment spoke little about it. Back home, wives were left alone with their children.

"We now have a million Italian-Canadians who know nothing about the internment," Mazza says, "young people in schools who could discuss it . . . and learn something about democracy . . . and where it fails."

By remaining silent, the victims lost an opportunity to take part in the democratic process, he says. "This community was silenced, marginalized, denied their voice."

Duliani, who died in Montreal in 1964, worked as a journalist and playwright in Paris from 1907 until he came to Quebec in 1936. He founded the French-language wing of the Montreal Repertory Theatre three years before he went behind barbed wire.

Mazza notes that Duliani's newspaper, Montreal's *La Presse*, was banned by the War Measures Act from reporting what had happened to its own employee.