

Ernesto Livorni. Onora il padre e la madre. Poesie 1977–2010

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società borghese. L'incapacità e insieme l'impossibilità delle protagoniste di questi film di rivendicare un ruolo attivo nella società in cui vivono è significativamente in contrasto con la volontà di certo cinema italiano degli Anni Cinquanta che vorrebbe invece confermare l'auspicata identità nazionale della ricostruzione e dell'emancipazione delle donne. Antonioni, invece, rappresenta la crisi di identità femminili straniere a se stesse.

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Ernesto Livorni. *Onora il padre e la madre. Poesie 1977–2010*. Passignano: Aguplano, 2015. Pp. 277. ISBN 9788897738626.

With *Avanguardia e tradizione: Ezra Pound e Giuseppe Ungaretti* (1998) and, most recently, *T.S. Eliot, Eugenio Montale e la modernità dantesca* (2020), Ernesto Livorni has established himself as an authority on modernism in English and Italian poetry. Livorni, however, is himself an immensely talented poet, whose unique voice has gained in strength over the course of his long experience in the United States. *Onora il padre e la madre* gathers, in chronological order, his first three books: *Prospettiche illusioni* (1987), *Nel libro che ti diedi: sonetti* (1998), and *L'America dei padri* (2005). These are followed by a fourth group, *Onora il padre e la madre*, which gives the whole collection its title, and a final group called *Alibi del cuore*.

Echoes of the Italian poets who have most deeply influenced Livorni — Leopardi, Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Campana, Ungaretti, Pavese — can be heard throughout his work, but Livorni's voice is always his own. One early six-line poem, for example, opens on an ominous morning — “Nei baratri appenninici piomba / l'urlo dei corvi” — and concludes with “sfacelo / sovrasta le gialle ginestre” (25). In Leopardi's “La ginestra,” which comes naturally to mind, nature, embodied in the yellow broom plant, is a bright survivor on the barren Vesuvian landscape. Livorni, however, even in these youthful poems, inhabits a more damaged world in which nature itself is under threat. In another early poem he evokes a broken landscape — “Distese che si sgretolano / montagne frantumate” — which gives shape to the poet's own brokenness, his “vita sdoppiata” and “senno bilingue.” And it is out of this wreckage that the poet's voice is born, his language “scrostata”

(55), free now of the old carapace of literary tradition. Fragmentation, as the imagery here suggests, is necessary if poetry is to live anew.

Marco Fregni, in his excellent introduction, observes that in the poems of *Nel libro che ti diedi*, which Livorni wrote after he left Italy, the Italian sonnet serves as “una sorta di solidità linguistica” (11), a home constructed of words for a poet separated from his country and its language. For Livorni, however, the sonnet is not a cozy refuge but an opportunity to discover his own voice. Although these sonnets may look Petrarchan at first glance, a certain English mutation is at work. The hendecasyllables are arranged in octets and sestets, but that arrangement distracts, no doubt deliberately, from a rhyme scheme that often forms three quatrains and a concluding couplet — in short, an English sonnet. Livorni’s response to his Anglophone world is both authentic and modern.

One such sonnet turns on the image of his love leaning against a door, her eyes filled with an immense pain. She is about to show him “quella potenza d’amore che avevo, / serbata come linfa nella scorza,” and the memory of that “prima volta” makes him feel again its full “sollievo” and “paura.” The “scorza” and its “linfa,” which suggests the power of love to revive a hollowed-out life, leads to this exquisite concluding couplet: “ed ancora ti guardo e tu sorridi / come allora, ancora, quando ti vidi!” (121). Livorni is not afraid of such repetitions and internal rhymes when they embody, as they do here, the shape of his meaning; for in the end, what redeems this exiled poet’s experience is language itself.

In *L’America dei padri*, Livorni explores other closed poetic forms and also makes a few forays into free verse. One of his shortest, most compact, free verse poems expresses the exhaustion of a life defined by work. Here the speaker longs for a complete “inerte abbandono” on a foggy morning, but “non oggi, non ora.” The moist air condenses on his skin and the droplets, like sweat, disperse “come fuggissero pena e castigo, / e l’unica fonte è lavoro / nella ricerca del pane” (182). Here, in twelve lines, Livorni evokes not only his predecessors who worked with their hands but also those who worked, like he does, with their pens, and in particular, perhaps, the Pavese of *Lavorare stanca*.

Disillusionment, a recurring theme in this third book, finds its most bitter expression in “Ode all’America.” Here America is a welcoming whore, “pronta per tutti,” and the pleasure is all hers: “L’America ride tra le cortine velate, / ti succhia le labbra come pompelmi, / poi prende, ti gira e lenta ti fotte.” All hers, too, is the control, as the acid rhymes suggest: *religioni* and *disperazioni*, *cattedrali* and *grattacieli*, *mito* and *sputo* (186–87).

By the time of Livorni's fourth collection, *Onora il padre e la madre*, the speaking voice fractures, breaking into several voices, represented variously through italics, underlining and quotation marks. This is no mere imitation, however, of what one finds in, say, Eliot's *The Wasteland* or *Four Quartets*. Like Eliot, Livorni aligns his poetry with musical forms, but his fragmented voices are part of a harmony that was there all along. His "Oratorio," for example, is a sequence of poems in which the various voices sing in an interrupted, seemingly incoherent way. In the end, however, they form a harmonious whole, as in a musical oratorio, where, behind all the arias, there is a chorus and an orchestra to which each solo performer must eventually return. In the tenth poem of this sequence, a "moltitudine d'apparizioni," says one voice, threatens another voice, who laughs, however, "*perché non possesso già forma / di corpo.*" This other voice, this "tu," was once the "sussurro" of love, and its endless echo, as a third, narrative voice says, fills the surrounding void. And it is this assemblage of broken voices which quickens "l'argilla del sangue" (229).

In an insightful afterword to this collection, Mario Moroni says that Livorni's poetry resists being bound by geography or politics. As Livorni himself says, in his revealing "Nota dell'Autore," the exile's only homeland is the ever-fluid sea, which moves back and forth between the two worlds. The result, in Livorni's case, is a poetry that is at once beautiful and moving and inviting.

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Augusto Del Noce. *The Age of Secularization*. Edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. Pp. 270. ISBN 9780773550919.

Augusto Del Noce (1910–1989) was a leading Italian philosopher during the Cold War era. Chiefly associated with the Catholic world, he taught at the Universities of Trieste and Rome, and served as a Christian Democratic senator during the 9th legislature in the 1980s. He collected several of his essays and lectures, produced between 1964 and 1969, and published them in Italy in 1970 as *L'epoca della secolarizzazione*. Almost fifty years later this volume received its English translation as *The Age of Secularization*.