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BOOK REVIEWS

Bastianutti, Diego. *Finding My Shadow: A Journey of Self-Discovery*. Arpa d'or, 2. Toronto: Club Giuliano Dalmato, 2022. Pp. 160 + 6 colour ill. ISBN 978-1-7778-5444-7 (paperback) \$30.

Diego Bastianutti's life story, as told in this autobiographical account, begins with a warm homage to his life companion for the past thirty-odd years, his wife, Giusy. Their years together have been very happy, fulfilling, and productive. This is not to say that the fifty years that flowed before this "seismic shift," as the author calls it, do not matter, or are of no consequence. On the contrary, the "before" years, remembered as often dim and confused memories, become the substance and essence of the story. These memories begin to have significance and importance, in other words, only after being painstakingly reassembled by the author, as an archeologist working with scattered shards of long-buried artifacts emerging into the light, similar to pieces of a puzzle finally acquiring form and meaning. This book slowly unravels the meaning of those "before" years, in what Bastianutti refers to as a nomadic life lived "in many places, in many cities, many spaces [...] but very few that I had truly 'inhabited' (137). This is one of the symptoms of a malaise that will be easily recognized by anyone who has experienced migration and uprooting and has painfully clung to the memory of a home lost forever. The fact that "home" in this story is ultimately identified with a woman is as old as the story of Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*. It is not a coincidence that the navigational metaphor, or actual references to sailing, at which Bastianutti is quite adept, recurs frequently in the book – and in his poetry.

In the case of Bastianutti the irretrievable home was Fiume, where he was born in 1939. He and his family were therefore part of that Giuliano Dalmata community forced into exile, a people forcefully uprooted and dispersed by political events during the tragic aftermath of the Second World War. Still only a child upon leaving Fiume with his family, settling briefly in Liguria, then still an adolescent crossing the ocean to the United States, moving from city to city, the young Diego crossed many borders. Eventually ending up in Kingston, Ontario, he was sustained into adulthood and then mid-life by a strong urge to return to Italy. It was a dream of many young men and women, unprepared to face a society they felt as alien in those postwar years, who

often confronted discrimination and rejection. Others found the transition to be easy enough and quickly “fit in,” adapting to the new circumstances and seizing opportunities, eager to not clash with their new surroundings. This, as we gather from this account, is what young Diego decided to do, and he assumed the guise of “the all-American young man.” The exile forced upon him and his family was nevertheless rendered less sustainable, as he matured, by a particular bitterness: “That of an indispensable innocence that was taken away from childhood, for having suffered the pains of an already adult life, before having been able to know the grace of a brief season of adolescence” (26–27) The dream of a return to Italy, naturally enough, would become the driving, if subconscious, search for a possible way back to a lost home/childhood and to a buried identity. This would begin to change only with his first return to Italy in 1960.

The decision to enter an academic career was an important and formative stage in the development of the restless Diego. His PhD in Spanish Literature, obtained at the University of Toronto, eventually led to a professorship at Queen’s University in Kingston, a position he would occupy from 1977 to 1995. In those same years he also assumed the duties of Honorary Vice-Consul of Italy, that strangely enough he carried out despite having been denied Italian citizenship for being “Croatian.” Though hired to teach Spanish, his interests in time turned more and more to Italian – again, that force pulling him back. Through a series of meetings with fellow Giuliano Dalmati, who formed a cohesive cultural community in southwestern Ontario, there also began a process of a deeper, more conscious sense of belonging to a “family,” the all-important gradual reawakening of his own identity, especially after the loss of his parents. Thus began the process of reintegration with culture and community that ushered in a period of remarkable creativity, accompanied by a series of twists and turns, as well as fortuitous and unexpected encounters.

The academic experience, coupled with the diplomatic activity as Vice-Consul, also presented him with interesting opportunities for personal and cultural growth. A summer program of study in Venice that he created in 1970 for Queen’s University was another important step towards the process of reintegration with Italian culture with which he had been only marginally familiar until then. It was an experience that, animated by a series of important friendships that would last a lifetime, also revived his creative potential. A similar program in Florence and Rome further contributed to his journey back to an understanding of “what it meant to be Italian,” a necessary step

towards realizing more fully “what it meant to be a Fiumano and a Giuliano Dalmata” (15).

The decision to leave university teaching, occurring soon after the meeting with the woman who became his wife, and the ever more frequent and closer contact with the Giuliano Dalmati, made possible a new important phase, and produced an intense series of projects and creativity that included those with the international Giuliano Dalmata diaspora. His reputation spread and earned him the respect of the literary community in other countries as well. Another momentous decision following his retirement was the move to Sicily for an intense six years.

There is no room here to list Bastianutti’s many achievements, but the reader is well advised to at least consult and appreciate the poetic voice that was liberated by the coming together of the various elements in his life to which we have only summarily referred in this brief space. From his first collection of poetry, *Il punto caduto* (Montfort & Villeroy, 1993) to his last, *Lost in Transit* (Self-Published, CreateSpace, 2019) and *The Lotus Eaters / I mangiatori di loto* (Legas Publishing, 2019), and the two in between, the reader will be able, after reading this book, to gauge more fully the personal and cultural itinerary that allowed the young Diego to finally come “home” from his many wanderings.

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