

Edith Bruck. *Versi vissuti: Poesie (1975–1990)*. A cura di Michela Meschini

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Comte. Del Noce labeled this “scarcely read philosophical interpreter of the École Polytechnique” as, more than Hegel, Marx, or Nietzsche, the real prophet “of the present situation” (57–8).

The second part of *The Age of Secularization* contains only two essays, each of which reflects the time-period in which it was conceived. The first of the two, “The Political Predicament of Catholics,” is based on Del Noce’s presentation in Lucca, at the Christian Democrats’ 1967 conference, which constituted the Party’s most significant discussions on the challenges of modern culture. Del Noce felt the time had come for the DC to address and understand how, coming on the heels of the *dolce vita*, Catholic Italy could deal with its new “affluent society.” The late 1960s saw upheaval everywhere and events on the peninsula alarmed Del Noce who felt that student protesters fell victim to one condition of the affluent society: neophilia. In his view, they felt that they were reinventing the wheel and wrongly connected the new opulence with traditional culture. In doing so, they cut any ties with a natural ally. Del Noce might have taken a page from don Luigi Giussani whose student movement, known eventually as Communion and Liberation, brought together both Catholic resistance to the affluent culture and the students. In sum, Del Noce’s work, its concern with the student revolts aside, does not tread much on the social and cultural aspects of secularization. This can be disappointing. Much more than Saint-Simon *et. al.*, secularization is the story of Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Walt Disney. It presents a story more of cars than of Comte.

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**Edith Bruck. *Versi vissuti: Poesie (1975–1990)*. A cura di Michela Meschini. Macerata: eum, 2018. Pp. 243. ISBN 9788860565587.**

Since settling in Rome in the 1950s, Edith Bruck — born in Hungary in 1932 — has adopted Italian as her literary language. She is a prolific writer with a career spanning seven decades to date. Although she has won several awards for her prose works, surprisingly her poetry has fallen out of print. The present volume, *Versi vissuti*, brings together three collections of Bruck’s poems, published over a fifteen-year period: *Il tatuaggio* (Guanda, 1975), *In difesa del padre* (Guanda, 1980) and *Monologo* (Garzanti, 1990).

*Versi vissuti* retains Bruck's author notes, as well as Giorgio Raboni's introduction to *Il tatuaggio*, with the valuable addition of a new postscript from the author and two short introductory pieces: "Rinascere nella parola. Prospettive critiche sulla poesia di Edith Bruck," by Michela Meschini and "«In agonia in amore»" by Paolo Steffan. The volume is further enriched by five photos supplied by the author, including the striking image, reproduced on the front cover, of Bruck in her youth.

In her introduction, the editor of the present volume, Michela Meschini, describes the captivating quality of Bruck's poetry, which renders her audience (and readers) "muta e vigile nell'ascolto" demonstrating the power of her verse to resonate with the audience, as a "forma di comunicazione vitale e necessaria" (5). Meschini's professed aim in creating *Versi vissuti* is to relaunch the three volumes of Bruck's poetry from the 1970s to the 1990s, bringing these works back into the public consciousness in a single accessible volume, and to demonstrate the "vitalità del linguaggio poetico come forma di conoscenza e di comunicazione di contenuti altrimenti inattuabili" (6–7).

Much of Bruck's poetry is autobiographical, and she has a wealth of life experiences to share with the reader, including the horror of being deported to Auschwitz as a child in 1944, and the murder of her mother, father, and brother in the camps. Showcasing three of her collections of poetry alongside one another, as this edition does, has the significant advantage of affording the reader an insight into the development of Edith Bruck's poetry, and her renewed attempts to grapple with the dominant experience of her past: her suffering and losses during the Holocaust. As a writer she shuns the affected style that is sometimes attributed to poetry: eschewing the highfalutin, Bruck opts instead for a direct style. Her verses often take the form of dramatic monologues, which engage and confront her reader with some of her most harrowing experiences. We are thrown off balance by the way in which her poetry speaks directly — to her mother:

Il tuo latte era già avvelenato  
da un presagio minaccioso  
le tue braccia stanche  
non mi offrivano protezione  
i tuoi occhi erano consumati dal pianto  
il tuo cuore batteva per paura  
la tua bocca s'apriva solo per pregare  
o maledire me l'ultima nata [...] ("Infanzia," 46, lines 1–8);

to her father (see “L’uguaglianza padre!” 51–53); to her brother, murdered in the camps, “Fratello mio numero cavia torcia / cenere albero” (see “Fratello mio,” 57–59), to herself and to her reader and contemporary society at large.

She interweaves Auschwitz and romance, demonstrating the complexities and competing emotions of life after liberation:

Non mi riconosco più  
 [...]
   
io che per un pugno
   
di pane rischiavo la vita
   
io che mi riscaldavo
   
con l’ultimo fiato
   
di chi mi fu vicino
   
io che dormivo nelle stalle
   
nella neve, non mi riconosco
   
oggi che ho tutto e niente
   
senza di te. [...] (“Non mi riconosco più,” 94, lines 1–12).

We witness Bruck’s ongoing struggle, her optimism (see “Mendicante d’affetti,” 112–14), which finishes with the beautiful, moving image of rejuvenation: “la radice è buona, / il verde ricresce / anche tra le rovine”), as well as her feelings of detachment and emptiness as her life continues irrespective of the pain of the past (see “Sembra che esisto,” 125). This juxtaposition is startling in “American express” (185) where Bruck writes of the pleasure she derives from a compliment, likening it to the joy of being granted a turnip in Auschwitz. Her conclusion to the short poem, “È bella in quei momenti la vita/ e come sono buoni gli uomini” demonstrates the survivor’s distorted perception of “goodness,” a complex warping of values that is thrust before the reader in a way that communicates so much in so few words.

In “Noi,” one of the later poems in this collection, Bruck writes:

Per noi sopravvissuti
   
il cielo o è molto bello
   
o è molto brutto, le mezze misure
   
le sfumature
   
son proibite (217, lines 7–11).

It is this binarity, this vividness, this extremity that makes Bruck's poetry so moving and so informative. She grants us unflinching access to her thoughts and feelings, no matter how controversial, how distressing, or how intimate. The difficulty of marketing poetry, and its lack of commercial viability mean that Bruck's poetry has often been overlooked in favour of her prose. For scholars and interested readers who really want to learn more about this fascinating writer, her poetry offers a unique insight into her childhood, her experience during the Holocaust, the legacies of survivorship, and her return to life after Auschwitz. Bruck uses her poetry, like her prose, to testify: her verses convey the horrors of the Lager, but they also testify to a *moving beyond*, to love and a rediscovery of happiness. Bruck's poetry takes her reader on a tumultuous journey which is moving, illuminating, devastating and, ultimately, unforgettable.

Bruck's poetry has not, to date, received the degree of critical attention it deserves. It is to be hoped that the present volume, by bringing together poems written over several decades into an accessible single edition, will reignite scholarly and public interest into the rich and important poetry of this fascinating writer.

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**Michael Antonio DiMarco. *Mundunur. A Mountain Village under the Spell of South Italy*. Santa Fe: Via Media Publishing, 2020. Pp. 337. ISBN 9781893765603.**

Michael Antonio DiMarco's 2020 text *Mundunur. A Mountain Village under the Spell of South Italy* is a refreshing new work that explores the history and alterity of Southern Italy through the prism of the author's familial and cultural heritage. Although there are many texts written by ethnic Italians living outside of Italy recounting their actual or metaphorical endeavor to understand their ancestry and cultural identity, DiMarco's text stands out as unique. *Mundunur* successfully and comprehensively guides readers through the history, culture, and economy of Italy's Mezzogiorno since the Paleolithic period while strategically and effectively using the history of his ancestral village of Montenero Val Cocchiara, known also as "Montenero," or "*Mundunur*" in the local dialect, to illuminate these changes. Furthermore, DiMarco's background in editing and publishing becomes obvious through his easy to read narrative style, exhaustive research, and attractively