

## Vito Teti. *Stones into Bread*. Trans. by Francesco Loriggio and Damiano Pietropaolo

Paolo Chirumbolo

Volume 41, Number 1, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087340ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i1.35903>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0226-8043 (print)

2293-7382 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Chirumbolo, P. (2020). Review of [Vito Teti. *Stones into Bread*. Trans. by Francesco Loriggio and Damiano Pietropaolo]. *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 41(1), 163–166. <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i1.35903>

Montale si è recentemente parlato di modernismo, e Massimo Colella offre qui, con l'analisi di *Fine dell'infanzia*, una prova ulteriore della giustezza di questa collocazione. Rossella Riccobono, analizzando *Lavorare stanca* di Pavese, si concentra sulla riscrittura del mito e sulla capacità del discorso poetico di raccontare e unire attraverso la coscienza e l'inconscio autoriale (199) una realtà fondamentalmente frammentaria e inserisce così, per la prima volta, Pavese tra i nomi del modernismo. Lo stesso fa il saggio dedicato Clemente Rebora, che ne intreccia le parole con quelle di Eliot e di Mandelstam per tesserne una lettura modernista. Per Rebora, come per Pavese e Papini e gli altri, si può considerare felicemente compiuto l'intento curatoriale succitato, quello cioè di permettere nuove interpretazioni e nuove mappature delle opere maggiori e minori della nostra modernità, spesso -aggiungo- facendo dialogare le voci italiane con quelle del modernismo internazionale. E già quest'ultimo, di per sé, è un passo di innegabile interesse.

CRISTINA CARACCHINI  
*Western University*

**Vito Teti. *Stones into Bread*. Trans. by Francesco Loriggio and Damiano Pietropaolo. Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2018. Pp. 235. ISBN 9781771833387.**

Originally published as *Pietre di pane* (Rome: Quodlibet, 2011) Vito Teti's representation of the immigrants' experience has been recently republished by Guernica, as *Stones into Bread*. The book, translated by Damiano Pietropaolo and Francesco Loriggio, gives English speakers access to a text the complexity of which fully accounts for the complexity and trauma of people living in-between worlds.

Born and raised in Calabria, Vito Teti has strong ties with Canada and the city of Toronto. His father, who moved to Canada in 1952 when the author was "barely two-years old" (94), did not bring the family with him and left it behind, in the old village. This life event deeply affected the author's perspective on immigration. As he explains in the "Prologue" ("Of Remaining"), the act of remaining is just as crucial and important as the act of travelling. The two of them go together, hand in hand. They are, to quote Teti, "complementary, need to be thought of and be narrated together" (18). Teti's insightful take on immigration is further explained later on when he writes: "For many people staying back hasn't been a short-cut, a symptom of laziness, a comfortable choice. On the contrary,

it has been an adventure, and act of foolhardiness and, perhaps of bravery [...] remaining is the extreme version of voyaging” (18).

The act of *restanza* (staying behind) is what links all the stories in *Stones into Bread*. Whether they are autobiographical, based on true stories or legends, anecdotal, or completely fictional, the ten narratives mostly focus on the lives of those who decided to stay in the Calabrian towns at the center of Teti’s life-long anthropological research (see also his *Il senso dei luoghi*, Rome: Donzelli, 2004; and *Quel che resta*, Rome: Donzelli, 2017). They are the stories of children such as Angelino (“Angelino’s Turn”) who, happy and comfortable in his little village, does not want to leave it, and wants to stay back as long as possible as a “custodian” (20) of his birthplace. Teti includes his own story; in “The Road to Vallelonga,” the author travels back in time and remembers the sounds, voices, and noises of the feast of the Madonna of Monserrato, and the streets full of outlandish characters (the *codderaru*, the *crastaturi*, the *sampavularu*) who, once a year, transformed life in the village. That culture, writes the narrator, is now gone, and that joyful childhood past cannot be relived. All we can do is to talk about it. As he puts it: “We all have our childhood in our own time, our Vallelonga to live and to remember. We can’t take over the time of other people. One doesn’t return. If not with writing and memory” (44).

Food plays an essential role in *Stones into Bread*. “The House of the Thirty-three Loaves of Bread” and “Figs in Toronto” are in this respect pivotal. In the first story, bread becomes the symbol of the hunger of Calabrian peasants who, unable to buy expensive white bread, were forced to consume loaves of awful breads made with “discarded flour, heavy, inedible, cheap because of poor quality, of sorrowful cereals from sorrowful lands” (50). The move from dark bread to white bread, both at home and abroad, marked the transition into modernity, and the end of what Teti, *via* Pasolini and Felice Chilanti, calls the “age of bread.” The second story takes place between Calabria and Canada, and centers around one of the most delicious fruits one can find in the Calabrian countryside. Franco, who is about to return to his new home in Toronto after a brief summer vacation, pays a visit to his friend *compare* Vincenzo. Here, he picks up a basket of fresh figs that will travel a few thousand miles to land in Canada, where they will be distributed among Franco’s relatives and close friends as a sign of respect and friendship. More importantly, the figs in this story represent the old village and its flavors, and that mysterious and unbreakable bond connecting the two worlds.

Teti’s most autobiographical story is undoubtedly “The Shadow and the Sewing Machine.” In this chapter, the author explains how, as a consequence of

his personal biography, he became an anthropologist: "I've never consciously chosen migration as the field of ethnographic research," he writes, "rather, I have been chosen" (95). "The Shadow and the Sewing Machine" also chronicles Vito's first trip to Toronto (a "reverse pilgrimage," as he calls it; 99), during which he discovered and explored his father's new home. In Canada, Teti finds out that Calabrian immigrants have created a "double" of the old village, with backyards rife with vegetables ("cabbage, rapini, green beans, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants"; 105) resembling the vegetable gardens of the old world. However, and this is one of the most crucial aspects of *Stones into Bread*, to interpret this act of "doubling" as nostalgic would be a mistake. This is not a mere reproduction of what was left behind. It is, rather, a new invention, and immigrants should be thought of as "innovators" (105) and not as nostalgists.

The next four short stories zero in on characters who either decided to stay back in the village (the narrator himself in "Murat's Nets," Vittorino in "Clouds and Back Streets"), or left only to return home once and for all for their final journey, in a coffin (Giò the mechanic in "The Stones of My Cousin Giò," Turi the storyteller in "The Emperor's Funeral"). To overcome this sense of loss and bereavement, and hold onto a vanishing culture, we can resort to memory and storytelling: "When a person disappears," points out Teti, "especially one that embodies the spirit of a place, a kind of granite-strong collective memory forms around his absence to ensure that he won't be forgotten, that his memory will live on" (154).

*Stones into Bread's* last story ("Village Mother") is dedicated to Caterina, the author's mother. This touching tribute provides Teti's collection with its most appropriate ending. "Cummare Caterina" (188), the main character of this story, takes on several symbolic meanings: she represents all the villagers who never left home and remained in Calabria to protect the sacredness of their places; she represents time and its precariousness ("She has a clear sense of the passing of time"; 189); she stands for life and death; above all, she represents all the villages of all the immigrants in the world: she *is* the village-mother waiting to embrace her children one last time.

In conclusion, Vito Teti's masterful account of the immigrants' experience, of their leaving, returning, and staying, will take the reader on a fascinating journey through the streets of Calabria and Canada. A lot of credit must be also given to the two translators, who were able to remain faithful to Teti's complex prose and preserve the original flair of all the poetic interludes interspersed throughout the text, and to Guernica, for believing in such an important editorial enterprise.

*Stones into Bread* is a welcome addition to the field of diaspora studies, a book that will capture the imagination of both professional and leisure readers.

PAOLO CHIRUMBOLO  
*Louisiana State University*

**Ernesto Livorni. *L'America dei Padri — The Fathers' America*. New York: Bordighera Press, 2016. Pp. 101. ISBN 9781599540917.**

Bordighera Press ci regala un gioiellino con questo vero e proprio poemetto, in edizione bilingue, di Ernesto Livorni, impreziosito da un lavoro d'arte di Graziano Livorni, *L'equilibrista*, in copertina, che ben evoca l'abilità, e la difficoltà, di tenere in equilibrio elementi vitali tanto numerosi e diversificati. Nell'immagine ci sono un volatile (forse un falchetto?), un orologio a pendolo, un grande fiore, una chiave di violino, una sfera, un grafico di funzione, un aeroplanino modello, una fonte luminosa... tutti tenuti precariamente in equilibrio da un paio di mani aperte.

Livorni è ben noto al pubblico italo-americano come studioso, poeta, e intellettuale che anima la rivista *L'ANELLO che non tiene: Journal of Modern Italian Literature*. Oggi ci regala una nuova raccolta poetica, circa la metà dei cui componimenti è già comparsa in riviste e antologie fra il 1987 e il 1997 (alcune affiancate da versioni in inglese, anche d'autore). Ma il poeta ci presenta qui una costruzione architettonica ambiziosa, che ripensa quelle liriche collocandole in un impianto epico-narrativo che autorizza Alberto Bertoni a parlare di "poema" nel titolo che dà alla sua prefazione all'opera (prefazione che tuttavia si colloca dopo il primo duplice *exergo*, in cui vengono chiamati in causa Ungaretti e Apollinaire sul tema del rapporto con il padre, e dopo l'indice). In essa, Bertoni dedica ampio spazio alle questioni riguardanti la "poesia dal doppio passaporto" (xix) e la rivalse dell'italiano come "lingua minoritaria ma letterariamente canonica" (xvii), prima di evidenziare la "dimensione epico-narrativa" (xxi) di questa nuova opera poetica di Livorni.

Già Bertoni rileva la "cornice esecutiva" (xxi) di tipo musicale che presiede alla raccolta, ma non riconosce la fonte delle indicazioni di tempo che coincidono con quelle dei quattro movimenti della Nona sinfonia di Beethoven, dalla quale noi ci faremo guidare per la disamina del volume, invitando il lettore ad accostarsi all'opera accompagnando la lettura con l'ascolto della sinfonia.

Il tempo della prima parte ben si presta ai temi, soprattutto legati all'epopea dell'emigrazione: l'avventura sulla nave, i treni, il lavoro manuale, la solitudine