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The Scorpion's Dark Dance by Alfredo de Pachi

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like motion, between a wide angle and a macro-lens. The wide angle allows Bruno's and the reader's gaze to embrace large, panoramic portions of the visual field and therefore perceive a series of connecting perspectival relations that in perfect keeping with the metaphor of the ruined map, are subject to the distortion of the wide angle; a distortion that must be "corrected" by the reader who thus becomes aware of his/her role in the making of the image. Then there are plunges into the fractal world of microhistory, the macrolens blowing up details in the map into sites/sights, metonymically suggesting the shape of the whole from what is missing.

It comes as no surprise that a crucial term in Bruno's book is *transito*, a word she leaves in Italian—a signifier thus brought into relief. *Transito* indicates Notari's cinema literally at the crossroads of Neapolitan cityscape and Bruno's camera the transient focal length. Film spectatorship, no longer enchained to the passivity of a prisoner in Plato's cave, is also a matter of *transito*. Imagined in term of fluidity and mobility, female desire is itself, of course, a *transito*. And the discourse of women, as that of other marginalized groups—all those who encounter difficulties "matching one's own image unless through excessive ana/logos or with a mask" (229)—is also characterized by *transito* and transvestitism in the form of a metaphorical tension, a search for metaphorical recipients of one's socio-discursive positioning and identity. In sum, *transito* implies mobility rather than fixity, process rather than essence, nomadism rather

than sedentariness, thereby suggesting the position Bruno would take in the domains where these opposites are pertinent and circulating.

Just as with the images reflected on the train windows, where you occasionally catch glimpses of yourself looking, there is an extent to which Bruno's book forces you into a sort of self-awareness: readers inevitably explore paths of sense congenial to their desires. You know that drawing of an ambiguous figure where, depending on how the viewer looks at it, either a young woman or a very old woman can be seen? Imagine that drawing becoming animated, and moving, and travelling, always on a double level of reading. You can never see the two images at once, you can only imagine them; hence you decide which image you'll be focusing on and you become aware of your desire. *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* acts a bit like that, for it is ultimately up to your desire to decide which alley to take, in your *passeggiata*, with a macro-to-wide zoom lens.

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The Scorpion's Dark Dance

By Alfredo de Palchi.
Riverside, CA: Xenos Books, 1993.

Looking at history with eyes wide open, it is quite possible to conclude that, left to our own devices, we humans are an unpalatable species.

Holding the standards of righteousness like talismans at the head of the line of march, we rush into battle against each other. Colossi of suffering rise everywhere, monuments to dogma.

We humans are a poorly-integrated amalgam of thinker and beast. At times, rationality is dragooned into the service of the shadow double, the predator. What the individual will not risk, the collective revels in. During such intervals—the Bosnias, Nanjings, “holy” wars, Wars to End All Wars—the delicate mask we call “civilization” peels off to reveal the creature’s true face: the face of a murderer.

We have our angels, however, as well as our fiends. In the arena of violence, though, it is virtually impossible even for the good to maintain their hold on gentleness. The young, caught up in these mass insanities, generally emerge (if they survive at all) deformed.

Alfredo de Palchi, a teenager thrown into prison when Fascism overran his country, was later forced to endure continued imprisonment and persecution by sectarian leftists. The poems in *The Scorpion’s Dark Dance* were written during and shortly after these years. The cruelties de Palchi experienced were so thorough, so ever-present, so global, that after a while they crept into and infected his soul: [from “il principio”], “...the egg/starting the womb/fit for affliction.” Mankind is damned from the point of conception; there is no hope, no escape: “deep down I observe my island roll/toward nothingness.” The very symbols of rescue are empty, the dove of peace becomes a war-oracle:

“...an/innocence that finds no shelter in the ark.” De Palchi himself is soon caught up in the maelstrom: “womb uprooted a mother moans/for her son:/shelled eyes/swollen knot of a tongue/from the telegraph pole he swings with me/clutched to his legs.” Another: “...I gut life in every form to conceive just/what defines us: weapons, blood...” The prison, in effect, becomes de Palchi’s tomb. It is well known that victims of war and imprisonment often, in consequence of what they have suffered, experience the disintegration of self. These poems exhibit this process well under way: “...I am the conquered battlefield/a boy armed with wounds...”; “...impostor christ, acknowledge me/practice compassion/I am the damned.”

David Ignatow used the analogy of “dumb language” (the signing used by mutes) to describe the syntax of these poems. I think this is an apt comparison: the poems in this collection emerge like first words: the early speech of a feral child—no qualifiers, no modulation, no adornment: the thing is what it is. Their language seems to have been yanked out of the poet, as in a violent, unwilling birth.

The Scorpion’s Dark Dance, while essentially a chronicle of war, also bears witness to the mysterious, redemptive power of art. Even though I’ve been writing and painting since childhood, I cannot define “art.” I can, however, testify that the making of art knits the threads of the universe into place.

It is the same for de Palchi: surrounded by demons and betrayers, without hope, he nonetheless retains a flickering ember of human warmth:

"After a long wait the beauty of Rimbaud/comes to sit on my knees..." The voices of poets, kindred spirits, visit and console him in his isolation. Their work is like a rope ladder hurled through the barred windows of his cell, a gentle force which persuades the barricades to lower.

KATHRYN NOCERINO

***Gaspara Stampa:
Selected Poems***

Edited & translated by

Laura Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie.

New York: Italica Press, 1994.

It should thrill women of every background, and men, too, to discover or rediscover Gaspara Stampa, an extraordinary poet, a contemporary of Vittoria Colonna and Veronica Gambara—two other famous Italian Renaissance poets. Her consummately crafted verse is adequately translated into an English which gives us a sense of her Renaissance Italian idiom in a beautifully designed bilingual edition. Her work invites comparison with the original Italian sonnets, the exquisite Petrarchan form in which this pioneer woman writer composed her poetry. Gaspara Stampa's poetry is one of longing and of suffering over love—an inheritance from the troubadour tradition.

"Who is Gaspara Stampa?" Americans might well ask, if they are unfamiliar with the Italian Renaissance. She was a light among Renaissance poets, and one of the few

women of her time to gain immortality through the love lyric. From Stortoni's informative introduction, we learn that Stampa "was born in 1523 in Padua of a noble Milanese family in decline." Her beloved was a handsome count of Treviso, one Collaltino di Collalto who seems to have brought her far more suffering and unfulfilled longing than joy—a tradition found in lyric poetry and opera as well. In 1548, at the age of twenty-five, Stampa met Collaltino in the salon of Domenico Venier, and fell passionately in love. Collaltino was the same age as Stampa and a patrician patron of the arts with some literary taste. The young lord fancied himself a poet, but Stampa must have overwhelmed him with her consummate mastery of the art of the sonnet. She showered him with her love in the form of poetry, no doubt frightening him away with her superior skill, or so this feminist imagines in the introduction. It seems that the better she expressed her love to him, the less he loved her.

Yet, reading her sonnets I am saddened. Here is a woman possessed by unrequited love, a story of painful love with which many women artists can identify. That is what makes this volume so interesting to contemporary feminists and to the men who long to understand them. Robert Bly is only one of many contemporary American poets very interested in the theme of courtly love in our time of gross sexual manners and mannerisms, and he, among others, would no doubt relish this volume written by the world's most famous female courtly love poet. Most of us are unaware of the women who wrote in