The Woman in the Box

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1

Mist
veils Vesuvius
rising from
the Golf of Naples
as cities scattered
along the coast from Naples to Selerno
listen to the cacophonic sounds of morning
night subsides
potions wear away
fatigue sets in

2

a rush to unwanted sleep
overcomes the frenzy
gestures kisses sensations
skin caresses smooth hard flesh
human perfume eyes wide
desperate pleasure a smile
early at the height of treacherous
momentary happiness

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the physical crash
slides like a hundred pound weight
from the top of the head to the bottoms of the feet
slows down the fast jerky stuttering
scooters and cars speed through
packed Greek Roman Italian
cobble stone dirty vias
holding up
an architectural palimpsest
stone by stone building the walls
of Athens Rome of modern Naples

swallows web the sky
over uncollected garbage
a bird’s morning song
between the beginning
(always a beginning)
and the computerized
church bells ring
call to an ancient tradition
horns warn of the coming
Naples comes
speeding headlong

the morning rush
congested streets, sinuses, and minds
packed in the city still possible to imagine
that it fits in the minds of its inhabitants
the mere thought of Naples today
the daily dull headache
the pain the measure of existence of happiness
to Greek and Roman and Italian and foreign residents
and the African vendors on La Via Toledo
and the homeless
at Napoli Centrale

6

the carabiniere will clear out
their non-consequential non-bathed bodies
their infected unclean sores
their acrid smell
their clothing rags, bedding and empty bottles
alcohol splashing on stomach walls
depth of rememories
of recollecting better times
quickly fade with the rising heat and humidity
the desperation for another drop of booze
of dope of help of any kind for
non-existent disposable beings

7

Neapolitans walk right through
The homeless’s eyes hearts thoughts bodies
Naples has a problem with garbage
It collects in the designated areas
It finds a home in unexpected places

8

dodging trucks cars scooters people
I cross Via A Diaz
avoiding productive working bodies
tip-toe around dog shit
toward Via Monteol Iveto left
to Piazza Del Gesu’ Nuovo
her short curled blond hair
hangs above a child-like filthy face
bad complexion
large brown eyes
blue red tattoos
grace her arms her neck
at the base of her back
a pale pink
secretive wound blossoms
around the red ink
a line to a light black blouse
beige jeans under a pierced belly button
look up to her pierced
lip nose and eye-brow

in momentary peace and slumber
warmed by scarves towels a few blankets
two large dogs three puppies
Naples woman lives
in a five by five cardboard box
the pride of Naples of Italy
of the first world of the great cultural production
of technically advanced modern globalized times
Naples’s brilliance
Italy’s youth

no jobs for Italy’s youth globalizers
only American rock movies clothes
advertisements on street posters
and billboards leading to
U.S. Air Force Naval N.A.T.O. bases
tourists Big Mac hamburgers
U.S. universities’ and colleges’
education abroad programs
shitting stalls for the homeless
dope addicts mentally disturbed
unemployed fatally ill
(wise move for the Italian politicos)
comedy and pathos
for the Italian anus to smile and crap
ride the train to Pompeii
watch the heroin addicts
stumble on to argue
with the conductor

12

the woman in the box
stands outside
pushes back her hair
licks her fingers
on her shit-stained left hand
like licking chocolate
she tongues her hands again
and wipes her face
sits on sacred steps
the entrance gate
to San Domenico Maggiore church
with twenty more of Naples’s finest
young homeless
institutionalized to the streets

13

they talk embrace laugh
suffer the consequences
overdoses of bad heroin
alcohol ecstasy cocaine
a bad blowjob
gonorrhea of the mouth
an infected fuck of syphilis
AIDS gonorrhea TB whatever
Naples offers
whatever youthful orifice
Naples’s lovers convince
to sell to poke

14

open a vein
in the body
in the city
give them their
pursued and praised rush
to get it they lie fuck
do fellatio beg steal
get sodomized
kill attend mass die pray for it

15

the woman in the box
drug addict alcoholic diseased
wonderfully crazed
to the streets of Naples
a perpetual party
a forever high
being alive
watched dead people in hell
being dead
watching live people through hell
I don't dare fall out of grace
with the big mother guru
who in her power high sees life and art
through a narrow pipe
my face does not fit in the opening at the other end
I'm comfortable happy with that knowledge and /
feeling

the woman in the box
lunges speaks rapidly
stands shouting
gestures madly
moves her hands furious
breathes loud
screams unintelligible words
follows us
weeps loudly
we walk faster
the woman in the box pursues us
crosses busy Via Monteol Iveto
she bolts in front of a screeching car

she jumps in front of us
yells hysterically
gasping life or death
thrusts out her hands
violently thumps
her left index finger
on her right palm
screaming babble talk
at the top of her lungs
she foams at the mouth
Silencio cane rabiosa!
A shop keeper shouts
at the woman in the box
as we put distance
between her and us

19

we the anointed
war on terror
the horror and beauty of globalization
bathed with warm water
soap and shampoo
perfumed and powdered
mascara polished nails
hair spray lipstick
a dash of aftershave
deodorant in fine clothes
titled

20

she still screams uncontrollably
while Italians and Germans
fuss over political movie stars
for holocaust films
on Scapponapoli
directly to the obelisk of plagues
triumphantly into the university
to a lecture hall discourse
to Italian lyceumites
about writing and painting
the Hispanic minority majority
democracy/imperialism/Bush
freedom/imprisonment/Ashcroft
money/poverty/immigration
jobs/education/gangs and so forth
at symposium’s end
to a bar and restaurant
I trail behind
always behind
listening to
the consecrated metaphysicians
and their hegemonic banter

21

she stands
on the steps of the
Church Del Gesu’ Nuovo
light on her feet
speaking loudly
swirling in her mind
high above
the obelisk of Naples
she dances
pirouetting faster and faster
she falls thousands of years
into the arms of
mystical, chemical bliss

22

she whirls madly
men and women support her body
prevent her from smashing her head
on the Greek Roman stones
nobody touches her body
the high the rush
that crazy girl
one of the PhDs calls out
see her held up by that weird man
in the eye of the pack
for a second I catch his eye
he says to me
these are my children
they love me
I hate them
I want to kill them
with pleasure
or make them stars in porno movies

I take their children
and sit on them
feed them love substance
and street survival skills
they grow up
sit next to me
on these steps
until they die

the man laughs at me
grabs the woman in the box’s
short blond hair
and slowly and proudly raises
her stoned head
for me to see
an innocent child
a beautiful Italian catastrophe
large full drops
rain on her face
spotting my linen shirt

26

crystal dirty water
filters down
one hundred meters
below the city
white foamy water
gathers in underground streams
nurture Greek Roman memories
that rise to the modern surface
float chest high
at times rise to glide
above the city streets

27

run directly
into the reality of memory
for micro-seconds
momentarily astonished
interrupted
in their modern life
made to participate
in a living event
from the past
made to meet fellow
ancient city dwellers
while the memory
moves others places
in the city
at times
a person with facultad
steps into a rememory
and depending
on their state
experiences it calmly, sweetly
or will scream
at the unknown people she sees

three bananas and three apples
early in the morning
a cloud covers Vesuvius
I take three apples and three bananas
to the woman in the box
she sleeps peacefully
her fingers almost touch her lips
like a child
somebody’s beautiful baby
somebody’s daughter
I drop the bag of fruit between her
And her young male companion

their heads
and knees weave close
in an open neutral space
where fruit waits
her dogs sleep
lean tight against her
a woman
walks by
shaking her head
31

a prayer
I am sure
a prayer
for two Neapolitan
fallen angels
sleeping in a box
I cut the strada
dunk a croissant
into my morning coffee

32

the strada now filled
with morning people
motor scooters
cars and trucks
smoke rubber
garbage stench
barking dongs
obscenities

33

I came by hydrofoil
from Sorrento to Naples
outside the bay
I look forward
to the city
a dark brown
dirty curtain
decorates the city
like a brown silk ribbon
war destruction
I board a train to Pompeii
The white mold figures
in the Orchard of the Fugitives
pose in the position
in which they died
the woman in the box
her companion
her dogs
Naples's present day catastrophe
two young human beings
pose like the dead fugitives of Pompeii

a famous cultural philosopher theorist
states Naples has three obelisks
dedicated to the natural and human
caused disasters of the city
the woman in the box
is the twenty first century
a new millennium monument
to Naples

that night returning
to my hotel
I see the woman in the box
on the steps
of the Church of Del Gesu’ Nuovo
playing with three young people
in the morning I take
three ham and cheese sandwiches
and a quart of milk
find the woman in the box
with her companion and dogs
in a deep tranquil sleep

the first time we saw
the woman in the box
I remember hearing
one of the woman scholars
say this poor girl has bearing
she must come from a middle-class family
the stench made the scholar quickly walk away

I study her face
for a while
I place the bag of sandwiches
and the carton of milk
between the posing monumental bodies
that night
the scholars dine on the sea shore walk
in a bright happy restaurant

young people gather
new scooters, Hondas, BMW motorcycles
shiny new Mercedes-Benz VWs, Alfa Romeos
well dressed
young women beautiful
the young men handsome
they call out to each other
confidently teasingly
many walk hand in hand
several couples kiss
straddling their motorcycles

41

the emperor’s children
Naples’s well to-do children
of the Greek families out on the town
one hundred meters
below the modern city
thousands of years ago
Caesar’s children kiss their parents
go out to the Naples streets
thousands of years ago
fifty meters under
the modern streets of Naples
children’s joy and laughter
gather here in the bright restaurants
with a view of the antediluvian
dancing Bay of Naples

42

in the morning
I pass by the obelisk
dedicated to the plagues of 1616
that killed thousands of Neapolitans
Renaissance Naples
provided the answers
in art and science
to the known world
twenty-first century Naples
struggles to collect
the trash and garbage
that piles up in the city
its buildings crumble
ins monuments
deteriorate overwhelmed
overrun by tourists

Naples’s beauty hidden
in secret places
between the woman in the box’s
body and her friend
a tin pan
filled with milk
the ham and cheese sandwiches
devoured by five happy dogs
wagging their tails
a puppy takes a puzzled look at me

hers is
a new
joy different happiness
that I don’t know
in the new world
I leave Naples
early Sunday morning
a cloud still covers Vesuvius

Flying 35,000 feet over Winnipeg
June 1, 2003