

alberto masala

IN THE EXECUTIONER'S HOUSE

(nella casa del boia)

translated by Jack Hirschman

cover design by Agneta Falck

CC. Marimbo press
PO Box 933 - Berkeley, CA 94701-0933

INTRODUCTION

In my introduction to Alberto Masala's poem, Taliban, which he wrote inspired by the work of RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, I spoke of his long-time commitment to the poetry of engagement, to a poetry that not only speaks the heart but excavates the soul's journey in order to expose the evils of capitalism and thereby inspire the reader with the will and hope for changes of conditions.

In The Executioner's House continues his journey of engagement. The poem attacks the machinery of War in its most current mobilization and menace, especially after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. From the "daybook" (newspapers and media) of our global despair, which is enunciated in the very first, brief strophe of the work, Masala climbs to a thematic litany of the effects of destruction by war and then develops, for each line of the litany, a total poem revealing the evil of war. The work concludes with a polemical Coda that stamps with emphasis the poet's view of these dark days in the world's night.

Alberto Masala is one of Italy's finest poets, a voice for the people not only of Italy but of all who aspire to a world transformed. Like many poets throughout the world, he has lived and worked at the margins of existence, where he has written poems that reveal the core of a totality of hope that authentic poetry always reveals. He is a street poet in the very best sense of the word, strongly influenced by poets such as Majakovskji (the first street poet of the last century), Artaud (the great French polemicist: Masala speaks and can think in French as well), and the confronting public performance work of the American Living Theater, which he experienced as a young poet when that Theater lived and worked in Italy.

Masala's "zone" is the Pratello district of Bologna, that part of the city which is known for its creative vitality, its artists and poets, its poverty. He lives there with his artist-musician companion, the lovely Fabiola Ledda who, like Alberto, is originally from Sardinia. But Alberto is known throughout Italy and Sicily through the many public readings he has given through the years, readings that are stirring examples of the commitment to the engagement of the poet with his times. And in recent years, he has read many times at the great international festivals organized by the Casa de la Poesia of Baronissi.

Anarchism in the States is different from anarchism in Europe, where that tradition often verges on the communist movement without the stupid invective American anarchists sometimes throw up when they hear the word "communist". Anarcho-communism in Europe has a strong tradition, especially in the cultural sectors, and Masala and I have never failed to recognize in each other a camaraderie that resonates to the greatest poetic vision ever written by an American, "The Song of the Open Road" of Walt Whitman, as well as to the great poets of Italian engagement---Scotellaro, Pasolini, Pavese and Brugnaro.

This work re-affirms not only all those voices, but in giving no aid and comfort to the enemies of the people---those who threaten the world with war and the profits of death---will inspire the young of this generation to heights of resistance. Those already in motion in "the movement of movements" will recognize this work as a part of their own vocabulary. Others, just beginning in the struggle, will be thrust forward through Masala's poem.

Jack Hirschman
San Francisco 2003

Zum beispiel

let us suppose - for example -
that just this sheet *and the word, or the sound
that is contained there*

be - for example -
putted *in the silence, and freedom
sheet, word, sound,
and also you and me*

on top of this table *that bears
years, silence, sound,
and sheet, and word, and freedom
and also you and me*

where

*suddenly and as an example
simple and exemplary
or else a god
(maybe American, certainly white)*

the bomb

is already destroying it *sheet word sound
and table and silence
and years and freedom
and also you and me*

*pages under the wind
and...
as wind is light
while it scatters voices
torn from newspapers
that convey the unheard dead
cries of ink
defenseless
as children*

No bird could ever fly over an explosion

No tree could ever be planted on a bomb

No idea could ever live based upon cadavers

No cement could ever be mixed with blood

No son could ever be born from a dead person

No culture could ever grab hold of a weapon

No word could ever be heard from a murderer

No boss could ever be overlooked by a cop

No freedom could ever be talked about by a military man

No peace could ever be sung in a barracks

No poem could ever sing of one state

No words of love could ever be uttered in the name of an absolute god

**NO BIRDS COULD EVER
FLY OVER AN EXPLOSION**

*the silence before an explosion
isn't the same as after*

*a honed scythe
a lightning-flash
something icing up*

*water that flows silent and cold
from carrying the names
of those many dead
not even ferried
because the Acheron also is western
and carries only
NATO's dead*

*the after is a window flung open
once again on the silence*

*and if the other doesn't rest
you'll sell that silence as well*

and maybe the result is a good deal

**NO TREE COULD EVER
BE PLANTED ON A BOMB**

*they say the bridegrooms
were asking for a blessing
from on high*

*they've been heard on high
only by the solemn flight of B52s
out for a drink
attracted by blood*

*and down came bombs
with angelic levity
from this side of democracy*

*the negation of tomorrows
torn asunder in the shadow
that the afghani tree
cast on the wedding
of the peasant
who finally understood the lesson:*

don't plant any more trees!

**NO IDEA COULD EVER
LIVE BASED UPON CADAVERS**

so
as an exemplary form of an idea
from high realms
phantoms of questions remain
and dead people without graves
and what simply no longer blossoms
save under sand
and yet
fear needs to climb

**NO CEMENT COULD EVER
BE MIXED WITH BLOOD**

*your curse
pipeline of death
wells
that gush dead people
mixed with oil*

*here are the conditions
for defending the normalcy
of a scheduled plan
that tightens circumstances
in whatever direction
provided it's a prudent one
or at least...a pale tension*

*well of anxiety
that the sense of guilt
vomits up along with
an excess of food*

**NO SON COULD EVER
BE BORN FROM A DEAD PERSON**

*inactive bodies larvae
obese and greedy
appearances of life
jammed in a boring labyrinth
of comfortable and annoying incidents*

so much trouble...

*the trouble unfortunately always lives
where difference gives birth to its own difference
but insists and thrashes and thrashes
sleepless with accusations
of an untamable anxiety of impotence*

**NO CULTURE COULD EVER
GRAB HOLD OF A WEAPON**

*the ceremony always repeats itself
and disaster tries one's strength every time*

*and history's offence grows
that only chews on appearances
swallowing down normalcy
as history isn't our history*

*go into the streets
look around
our justice is there*

*now peace is stable
and you're sheltered
in a neighborhood between good and evil
hearing about the war
and looking at death*

*meanwhile you go into life
anyway
to see the defeats*

your days all the same

**NO WORD COULD EVER
BE HEARD FROM A MURDERER**

but our song lives

*and every day arranges the horizons
and the stars in the sky*

*and by not silencing the word
it confronts the irresistible desire
that still remains at our side
even in the absence
giving color to the mistakes
because beauty and love
exist*

*and in love exists
beauty and error*

and we love the beauty of error

**NO BOSS COULD EVER
BE NEGLECTED BY A COP**

*they lie like robots
because they've been told to lie
because that's the way it is
in lying
they recognize each other and march as one
in the battle pose*

we've become accustomed to by now

*frenetic orchestra of words
shamelessness
sirens*

*if victims are shown
the spectacle's a sure winner*

**NO FREEDOM COULD EVER
BE TALKED ABOUT BY A MILITARY MAN**

*a screen shows us the limits
of automatic happiness
that sells consent at a high price
and guarantees prolific ignorance*

*there's blood in the message
and always new names
for desperation*

*the nothingness that thunders in our ears
fights with death over the victims
to put on a show
ever more surprising*

*this theater
wants more spectators
and they'll get richer
and to glut themselves they'll kill again*

**NO PEACE COULD EVER
BE SUNG IN A BARRACKS**

*armed and military cars draw up
to oversee the utopias
that have sustained us*

*a hundred standing soldiers
block the way
expecting a shot
to strike a blow for the dreams and the passions
reds of truth*

hopes are young teeth

targets to take aim at

**NO POEM COULD EVER
SING ONE STATE**

*careful
you who are muse-inspired*

*here it's not important to have beautiful inspirations
poetry and luminosity aren't seen
here there's nothing
no rhythm that can sustain
the dignity of these burning screams*

*etymys that support my head
when words are impossible*

*it's not excuses I'm making to you
when I spit poetry here
deafening with hunger and affliction*

**NO WORD OF LOVE COULD EVER
BE UTTERED IN THE NAME OF AN ABSOLUTE GOD**

*love is a god of skin and bones
abandoned
deformed by war
that by now digs into anxiety
among ruins of doubts
to carry some illusion away from the hell*

*for a long time
we waited for the revelation
the truth that we receive from screens*

*now the liberators
will convey a god to us
in a reality already programmed*

it's sure a good and just thing

*we've never known truth
without a middleman*

*What will I say to the children of embargo? What can I sing if they stumble over
projectiles?*

*O what, twenty years later, when the survivors will still be encountering those same
bombs (unexploded twenty years earlier, by luck)?*

We could tell them a god sent them.

And narrate stories about mythic battles between the gods.

The most powerful had many servants.

And many weapons.

And he even gave them to the others in order to play with them.

Then he wanted them back, but they didn't want to return them.

So he sent the angels.

*Rambo clones, stoned on Coca-Cola, that slowly donned chromosomes
to go into battle*

and kill like heroes

but these

aren't things that concern the gods

What an epic!

*To you, oiligarch-president
To you, dog-leaders who eat
from pig buckets
A bois, canes de istelzu, that you bring off
your dirty deals,
my thanks:
I thank you for the freedom
you've brought us*

*and you, America,
you know that one day one after another
witnesses will stand before you
from Vietnam, Chile, from Kosova and Kabul, Chiapas, Bhopal, Panama, Haiti and
Nicaragua, from all of Central America, from Brazil and Argentina, from Africa with
your black slaves and the red men of your plains, from the homeless and from Iraq
one day
one after another*

*God damn you, America,
your history's of blood
and calls for blood
preparing certainties of sorrow*

*Alberto Masala
La Torretta, october 5th, 2002*