
Francesco Dalessandro. *Aprile degli anni*. Novi Ligure (Alessandria): Puntocapo Editrice, 2010. Pp. 80.

Francesco Dalessandro belongs to the group of poets and writers who composed the editorial committee of the review *Arsenale* (1984-1987). Several still collaborate actively with the small press that founded and published the journal, Edizioni il Labirinto in Rome. Gianfranco Palmery, noted Roman poet, is the current director of the press. Three of Dalessandro's previous books and one chapbook were published by Edizioni Il Labirinto. Their volumes are well known for outstanding quality and elegance.

Dalessandro's current book has been published by another, perhaps less visually oriented, publisher. Nevertheless its numerous qualities are quite evident. Its finely crafted poems are showcased in a coherent structure, divided into four parts: *I In forma di nuvola e di pioggia*; *II Ore leggere*; *III Aprile e gli anni* (composed of sonnets or sonnet-like poems); and *IV Canti più incerti del canto*. Each section consists of twelve poems at times framed by introductory pieces or closed by epilogue-like compositions. This architecture is similar to Dalessandro's previous *Lezioni di respiro* and *L'osservatorio*. Unlike those volumes, however, this one is unified by a single overriding theme: love. It can be most easily and enjoyably read in one breath. The poems captivate and flow. At times they are ironic or melancholy. At others passionate and doubting. The following piece gives an excellent idea of the overall feel of this exceptional book:

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Che ti amo (densità
dello sguardo apre mondi
e unisce distanze di anni

fatte se mi ami) è chiaramente noto e può il mondo accertarsene da un solo sguardo e se (timidamente) ci amiamo quel che bianche nuvole fanno nelle lunghe sere e i fiori silenziosi sulla terra non è certo più bello e fresco del nostro respiro. (19)

The initial epigraph is taken from E. E. Cummings. There is a short postface by the author himself at the end titled “Per somiglianza d’ingegno.” Here, the intrigue, or, shall I say, the game, begins. In this brief note the poet explains the unifying theme of his book. Love and love poems yes, but also love of other poets and secret loves, love moments stolen here and there. Writing, as Eliot, Lautréamont, Petrarch, and others have reminded us, is rewriting and even theft. Poets steal from poets whom they love. In this case, the declared thefts are from E. E. Cummings and Pedro Salinas. As Dalessandro explains, at times he steals a line or two, at others uses a few lines and rewrites the poem completely. In sum, this is a form of creative translation and transposition.

The geometry of the book is present not only in its quadruple architecture but in the reconfiguration of certain poems. We note that both the liminal poem and the concluding one have marked rectangular shapes and are written in italics. They are rewritings of E. E. Cummings’ XLV, from *W (Viva)*. Cummings’ poem could also be considered a visual composition. It is shaped like a diamond or rhombus window pane. The perspective is through the dirty glass during winter. The words are cut to fit into this shape often broken without dashes or punctuation to guide us. Dalessandro transforms the rhombus shape into the rectangular windows of the subway. (We are reminded of Pound’s two-line “In a Station of the Metro.”) This transposition works quite well and is ingenious, especially since E. E. Cummings’ piece evokes crowds of people hurrying. Dalessandro uses a highly rhythmic line, often an hendecasyllable or one slightly longer (twelve syllables or at times ten syllables, etc.): “Tu d’invemo te ne stai dietro fredde / finestre ben chiuse la mente confusa” (5) Cummings’ visual meditation on winter and death is transformed into a piece on motion and the birth of a poem, which coincides with the arrival of the subway train: “Poi vestita di un fresco sorriso ecco lei / arriva.” Dalessandro’s closing poem repeats but inverts this situation. At the end, the train poem departs as the book ends: “egli siede / e ti parla — poi t’alzi e (vestita/di un amaro sorriso) te ne vai” (67).

There are many other inventive and successful instances of rewriting and poetic translation in *Aprile degli anni*. The third section composed of sonnets or sonnet-like poems, inspired by Pedro Salinas’ *La voz a ti debida*, is remarkably sustained. Even though the poems are inspired by two very different poets, Dalessandro is able

to maintain an admirable unity of style and tone throughout the four sections of *Aprile degli anni* (title taken from Leopardi's *Canti*, "Al conte Pepoli" and "Risorgimento").

There are clearly several ways to approach this book and its playful dimension. The reader can simply enjoy the poems and forget about the "sources," or one can compare versions, developments, translations, and rewritings. In the end the poet will always compose, as Valéry has reminded us, in relation to other poets. While many try to ignore or dissimulate this fact, Francesco Dalessandro has faced it head on and with considerable creativity and success.

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