

## The Woman in the Box

ALEJANDRO MORALES

1

Mist  
veils Vesuvius  
rising from  
the Golf of Naples  
as cities scattered  
along the coast from Naples to Salerno  
listen to the cacophonous 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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Alejandro Morales is a Novelist and Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies at the University of California, Irvine.

3

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

4

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

5

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 carabinieri 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

9

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

10

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

11

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 politicians)  
 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

## 16

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

## 17

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

## 18

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

23

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

24

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

25

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

28

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

29

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

30

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

34

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

35

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

36

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

## 37

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

## 38

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

## 39

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

## 40

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



43

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

44

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

45

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