

## "Telling Stories of Lands and Souls": a Quest for Communication and Peace in Italian American and Italian Poets.

Elisabetta Marino  
University of Rome "Tor Vergata"

"... Alberto Masala, who all consider art as a *vitalizing* element with an actual *healing power*. In their hands, art becomes a revolutionary means of upsetting dangerous hierarchies, of blurring boundaries between cultures, of overcoming the Western, Aristotelian binary logic of mutual exclusion (male vs. female, domineering vs. dominated, mainstream vs. minority), that is the distorted root of every conflict visiting our planet. Their poetry, through its exceptional capability of *synthesis*, has the power of creating connections (thus unblocking channels of communication), of conveying multiple meanings in a single word and of drawing life from all the cultures the poets have come across, all dignified in the same way. Moreover, through the readings and the performances based on their poetic texts, and by means of music (embedded in their works or accompanying them), these artists are able to reach a wider audience. The effectiveness of their communication, in fact, does not rely on the *written word* only, but also on the *oral, generative word*, on the way their poems are *read, sung* in different contexts and languages, on the outcome of their message, *blooming* in the listeners' souls. These poets are modern storytellers, who listen to the so-called *others of the world* and re-tell, re-invent their stories, without indulging in the same contemplation of their *ego* that, unfortunately, is still affecting many "academic" poets.

Alberto Masala is a performer poet who shares with Lina Unali his Sardinian origins, his writing in multiple languages (Italian, Sardinian, English, French, Spanish) and his composing with the help of a group of artists, interpreters, musicians, singers, with whom he "strolls" through all the cities of the world. In his effort to conciliate the opposites (which can be considered as the main feature of his art), and to propose a vitalizing idea of poetry, based on orality, he writes: "*Western* writing, and Italian, to begin with, so umbilical and *umbilicated*, so rolled up in their own little ego, provoke me to silence and distance. To me (...) poetry is something else: it's the voice of one who has seen the voices"<sup>1</sup>. His poetry stems from what he describes as "a strong artistic and existential discomfort with respect to the literary thematics of the West" (*ibid.*).

One work by Masala will be quoted, connected with his personal interpretation of the "literary expansion eastward": *Taliban, the thirty-two precepts for the women*, prophetically written a few months before the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> and inspired by the 32 precepts Afghani women must comply with, thus being deprived of any freedom of expression. The profit from the sale of this book has been donated to the *Women's from Afghanistan Revolutionary Association*.

By speaking in the first person and adopting the voice of a woman (which blurs, therefore, even the *opposition* between the sexes), Alberto Masala presents each precept followed by his/her cry against it, in what (once again) turns to be a polyphonic chant for human rights and peace. In his volume, Afghani women, confined in indoor spaces, condemned to *silence*, to *immobility*, to *fixity* - as the very

---

<sup>1</sup> *Taliban* has no page numbers. This quotation can be found in the paragraph entitled "About Poetry".

cover of the book testifies, by portraying a significant dumping ground for new (useless) shoes for women – can resume their freedom of expression and, eventually, take back their voice:

Precept 28  
PROHIBITION AGAINST WEARING WIDE-SLEEVED DRESSES, EVEN UNDER  
THE VEIL

to fly again  
Without being seen  
I make the most of the moon's absence

The smoke  
Is my witness

Because every time  
I have to cross the fire

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

MASALA, Alberto, *Taliban, the thirty-two precepts for the women*, Edizioni totalmente libere, Bologna, 2002