

Novel Review:

The Transaction by Guglielmo D'Izzia

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The Transaction
by Guglielmo D'Izzia
Published by Guernica Editions

The Transaction by Guglielmo D'Izzia, published by Guernica Editions, is the disturbing misadventure of De Angelis in 1987's Sicily. First time novelist Guglielmo D'Izzia has a pristine voice for the off-kilter, while grounded in European Modernism. A love song to Kafka-like absurdism reminiscent of a Sicilian Camus. The prose, the sweltering heat, each minor character who brushes against De Angelis' fumbling is executed to perfection. I recognize the draw of literature is as varied as our individual readers, those who dive into intrigue and thrills. Those who read for comfort. Non-fiction aficionados linger around education, provoking thought. D'Izzia's prose lives inside a bizarre space where beauty exists other-where, and the peace of a comforting tale remains finitely outside this dark tale. You won't find a fuzzy happy novel here.

The Transaction is real, the way Sisyphus cranes the muscles of his back to shift his boulder is real. That same effort, futile as Sisyphus' hillock and stone,

appears in our protagonist and narrator De Angelis. Sequestered in the sweltering Sicilian story with an acrid business deal, I cannot call De Angelis a hero. He isn't. A hero would leave when the deal was off. Called Montanari and confessed it never stood a chance. Returned to Milan with flowers and a crisp apology for the loss left behind in the train service's inconsistent wake. A hero would not have reacted to Figallia in a dour, unaffected way, where the only visceral response received is swooning nausea over the beauty of a prepubescent girl. Nothing about this sweat-laden unfortunate protagonist is heroic. Nor does he step toward salvation by the conclusion. I cannot in conscience find De Angelis as saintly as his name, and it occurs that D'Izzia never intended his absurdist Sisyphus to be holy. The entire descent to this increasingly disturbed trudge toward deviant futility plays out between halting exchanges with eccentric townspeople and sweltering days coated in suit fabric stuck to odiferous skin. His emotions seem anemic and distant, as locked away as the warehouse he came to purchase in the first place.

No, De Angelis is too human and too aching in the heat to be a

hero. I wondered of him, sympathized at first, before the continued whirls of absurdities struck with small glasses of granitas, or the endless meals De Angelis barely stomachs. Food seems as repulsive to him as the townspeople are repulsed by this Northern scourge. Whispers in their vernacular, no deal. No deal could possibly be done with this ill fated temporary delinquent holed up at the Landlady's drab room, with nothing but one ineffective fan and a throbbing leg.

Why doesn't he leave when the deal is off, the mediator gone? When the family yells and snarls for him to go? When the beautiful prepubescent daughter catches his eyes, why does De Angelis stay? Long after his thin suspicious welcome. Long after the drudgery of his unfortunately abysmal travels brought him to a town I imagine lays forgotten by the rest of the world.

The way Figallia wants to be, a still life daguerreotype with traditions seeped into life. Figallia as D'Izzia writes it, is alive in this snapshot. A world consistent of this mirror-Sicily in its awkwardness, deception, creeping discomfort and body odour-scented sunshine. Small

trattorias, restaurants, coffee alcoves, the landscape itself as mountainous as a cliff side where a boy nearly buys the farm. Just as De Angelis is no hero, Figallia is too deviant in its citizenry to be righteous. But it is richly experienced and that takes a talented novelist to produce something with such texture and reality. D'Izzia's prose is masterful in the intimate and confounding. His ability to create characters that breathe and falter on the page made *The Transaction* a fascinating, and worthy read.

The novel smelled of heat sweat, grappa and Italian meats, a pristine collection of incomplete buildings to incite the roving psychological introspection of De Angelis. As a reader, I wonder about the choices De Angelis makes. There are a few choices for plot's sake and not for the sense of the situation. Foremost in these was a tertiary 'staying' long after the welcome in Figallia dried up. When one unintentionally causes a tragedy upon a community, and is told to leave, I don't understand the impetus for De Angelis to remain.

I can only re-assert *The Transaction* is a masterful work of realism, absurdist rationale, and discomfort. The novel promised, "a Kafkaesque descent into deviancy" and it is exactly given word for word. If, as a reader, you want a titivating yet sometimes uncomfortable descent into the authenticity of human experience in a man's fall, *The Transaction* is a novel of promises delivered, in all its uncomfortable realities and well scripted ugliness.

