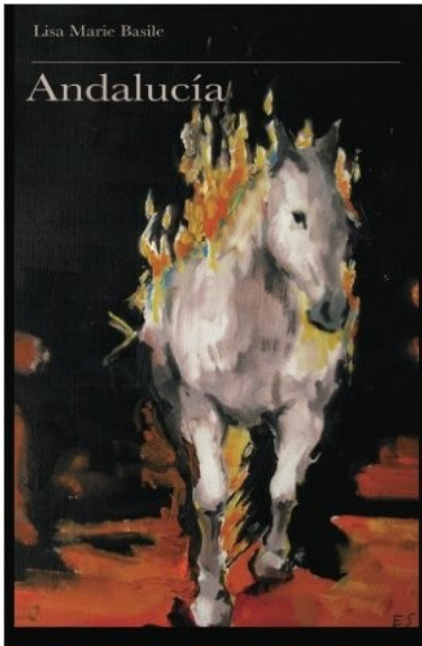


Geography the Phantom Lover: Andalucía, by Lisa Marie Basile
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Reviewed by Lisa A. Flowers



Lisa Marie Basile's *Andalucía* is the story of land transmogrified into a flesh and blood lover who stalks all who try to leave it: poetry that turns the classic "I Left My Heart In" tourist T- shirt into a binding shirt of Nessus. It's also a study of lineage and identity in the form of a backwards flamenco into the origin of species, a film dissolve of whirling white petticoats into a churning ocean of fish-to-human evolution. Here, Motherland becomes birth mother, and all goes back into the ocean from whence it came. But in that whale's belly, where Jonah might have huddled in darkness, Basile dances herself to the liberating frenzy of a blowhole. Many of *Andalucía's* winding cadences recall the rapt, hallucinogenic, headlong eroticism of *The White Hotel's* "Don Giovanni" opening poem, as well as Dario Argento fever-dream scenes in which we find ourselves standing in upper windows, "watching/through the holes of a blood doily." In Basile's vision, the Running of the Bulls is also the gallop of the fabled Red Bull, chasing the unicorns into the sea as whitecaps. The poem's speaker flees, pursued by a lover who might just be the city itself:

**Alejandro stalked me when I ran away-from
Gibraltar to Barcelona ...**

**Black
and white flowers fell from his mouth. I potted
them inside me.**

A kind of insemination is taking place. "Soon a new baby grew up/and looked like me." Yet:

**The child, Alejandro's child, was me
I could not remember my mother's
name. I could not remember my name. I was a
baby, his baby—teething on the continental shelf.**

Like a vampire who's just gained the ability to see their own reflection, the speaker is shocked "When I look in the mirror/[and] it is me all wrapped up in a bloody bonnet.../my face holding my face in its hands, recognizing I must have put myself here."

Andalucia is also largely a religious work, cleverly by way of Darwin. The implied wings of "I was almost sudden birds migrating/I almost migrated on two legs, two human legs" suggest angels. Too, there are beautiful passages that can't help but evoke a deathbed leavetaking, the moment right before a soul lifts off from itself:

**Mother sits covered in veils, facing the wall of
Castillo Montjuic, fuzzy worms and blood oranges
up the walls, Manet painting bridges from me to
her and from me again**

A bridge across forever. Some of the images recall the last scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey*:

**you see yourself in your youth standing in white
sand. You see your health. You see your blood for
the first time.
You see your sickness getting under
satin covers.**

When the moment comes, it's one of pure evaporation into light and sea-spray: Ceyx and Alcyone swept up into birds:

The offing swoops in as a thousand liquid sparrows

Which tie into exquisite lines of transfiguration:

**My mother is a satchel of insects flitting away from
me. She wants to find the light. Her monarchs
Eastward. Their atomic shadow against the apron
of some sun,
the last quantum bit of her wing song.**

Increasingly, though, existence itself is unclear. Who, in fact, is addressing us? When Basile refers, as often she does, to “a former life”, is she speaking of seeing the lives of her own forebears, or of her own reincarnation? Whatever the case, we’ve reached a point of exotic complacency in which time is no longer necessary, in which its ravages are not only moot, but refused with opulent languor, as with the wave of a jeweled hand stained with grapes:

**What if I’m happy to be a sinner, to
drink red until my skin turns.
To glimpse my former life-the happiness,
the calm quiet of an afternoon, so what?
To etch the entire Iberian Peninsula into my skin,
the bougainvilleas, the little bloody tapas:
... What if I am strong enough
to live with the presque vu?
The almost cupping
of my former life in my hands...**

Or, perhaps, Basile is telling a ghost story. “How can you disappear if you’re not sure you’ve existed?” the narrator asks.

**Sometimes you remember dying in the sea
but who can be so sure? ...
Reborn, or never dead, I caught a flash of the old
Me ...
Flashes, flashes. Flashes
every 33 feet under water, the old me down there ...**

**They ate the baby
until her eyes
my eyes
were as vacant as the sea**

And, like the couple in Grimm's *The Fisherman and His Wife*, we're back in our humble shack of beginnings, remembering the heady, opulent possibilities we've just left.