

Six Poems

NORMAN LOCK

from Alphabets of Desire & Sorrow,
A Book of Imaginary Colophons

Alphabet of Ash

Thinking only of the woman whom that night he would caress in her shuttered room above the via dell'Ariento, Carlo Poggi had looked on indifferently when, incited by the grim monk Savonarola, Ovid had been put to the fire—his poetry, the *Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris*, *Tristia*, and other of his elegies on love. (The fanatical monk, in his turn, would burn for sedition and false prophesy, in that same Paizza della Signoria where he had ordered “the Bonfires of the Vanities.”) No sooner had Ovid’s pages metamorphosed into black butterflies ascending the Florentine sky than Poggi forgot the lover awaiting him in perfumed sleep—so powerful an effect did that funereal ash have on his mind. Until his own death in August 1530, at Gavinana, put to the sword by a soldier of the Holy Roman Empire, Poggi would write in ashes his odes on annihilation.

Alphabet of Austerity

At light's slow descent untolled by Roman bells, the canals remembered their color and the wind, the motion of its atoms toward Utrecht, whose millstones' groaning woke the *winterkoning* and mills' wide blades threw shadows on the splintered grass. Soaked with gin and lust, Jan Bijns forgot his intemperate verses to his Anna's eyes and lips when he saw the sunward windows flame on the sober houses of the Dutch. Instead of wantonness, he would now praise the austere God of the Calvinists in poems that he had printed at his own expense with Valentin Haüy's chastened typography (called *sans serif*), first used in 1786 to publish *An Essay on the Education of the Blind*. Written *sans gin*, Bijns' work after his winter revelation is read today only by scholars of the period (so lacking is it in *joissance*, so full of earnest piety).

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